

Woolworths accused of copying baby carrier design

NEWSWATCH: Woolworths has once again been accused of plagiarising the product design of a smaller business. This time, the item in question is a Woolworths baby carrier, which entrepreneur Shannon McLaughlin claims is a copy of the carriers designed and manufactured by her small business Ubuntu Baba.



Image credit: Ubuntu Baba

In a [blog post](#) published on 7 January, McLaughlin explains how she discovered the retailer copied her product.

"It's 16 December 2018 and I've just found out that Woolworths has shamelessly copied the complete design and concept of the baby carrier that I have put my heart and soul into for the last four years of my life.

"At first glance, it looks like they've just used my product name 'Stage 1' and 'Stage 2' baby carrier. On closer inspection, I realise that they're using the exact same colours, grey and navy to my baby carrier. Upon further investigation, it appears that they have designated the terms 'Stage 1 carrier' and 'Stage 2 carrier' as Google Adword keywords. So when you search the term 'Stage 1 carrier' or 'Stage 2 carrier' – the exact names which are unique to my little business – Ubuntu Baba baby carriers and in which my business has a reputation in – Woolworths adverts come up above my organic search results."

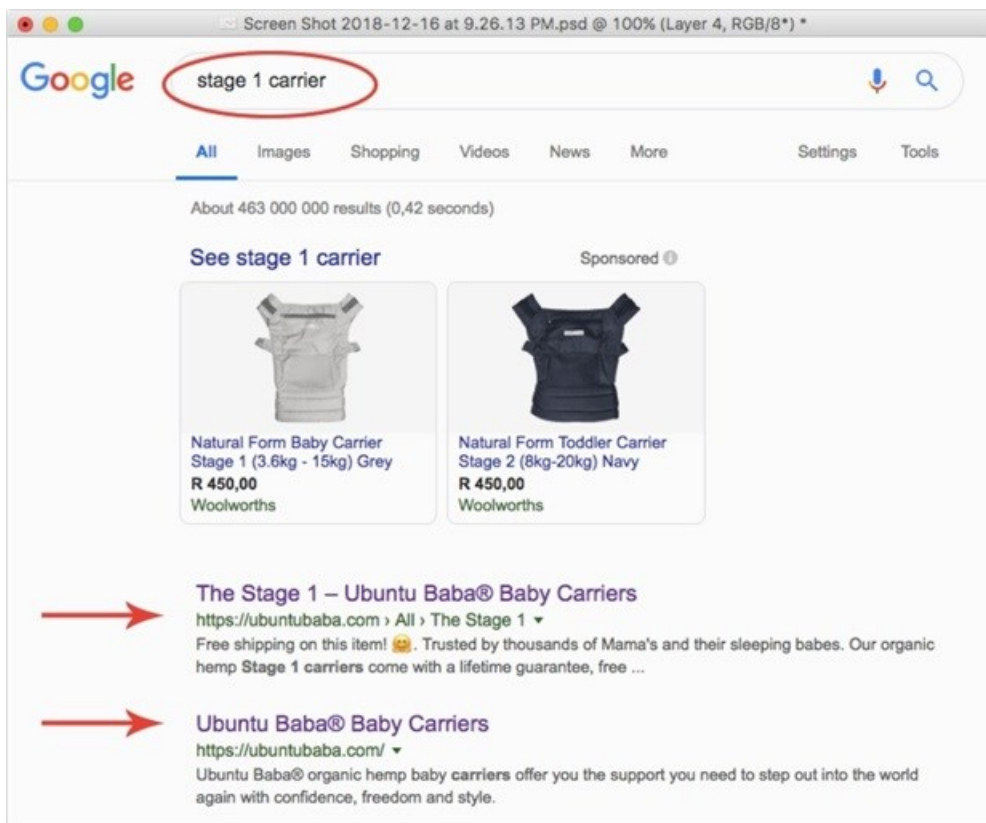


Image credit: Ubuntu Baba

McLaughlin notes that Woolworths is able to sell their carrier at one-third of the price that Ubuntu Baby sells theirs, because Woolies carriers are manufactured in China using polyester while Ubuntu Baby products are made in South Africa from organic hemp.

"We are proudly South African manufacturers, trying to make a difference by putting money back into the South African economy, instead of getting it made for a fraction of the price in China," she wrote.

"I'm all for Woolworths selling affordable, ergonomic baby carriers, and I'm glad my little business has 'inspired' them, but there is a big difference in taking inspiration and blatantly expropriating another's product – the way they have gone about this is nothing less than wrong," she added.

McLaughlin's own investigation revealed that two of her baby carriers had been bought via her online store and delivered to two women at Woolworths head office; one according to her searches on LinkedIn is a sourcing administrator and the second, a product developer at the company.

"For a company whose values include 'helping local enterprises to grow, and contributing to a prosperous, secure future for our country', Woolworths – I'd say you have some explaining to do," she stated in the blog.

Social backlash

McLaughlin wrote to Woolworths shortly after discovering their baby carrier but was simply told the matter would be investigated. After not receiving a firm response from the retailer, the businesswoman shared her ordeal by penning and sharing the blog post, which has since been shared widely on social media.

“ Wow [@WOOLWORTHS_SA](#). Not just blatantly ripping off an independent business *again* but to also buy the Google Adword keywords unique to this product. Appalling. Hope you get sued. <https://t.co/3enmt807Jf>— Nafisa Akabor (@nafisa1) [January 7, 2019](#) ”

The retailer has been lambasted by the public, with one consumer parking their SUV outside a branch of Woolworths with the words 'Stop Killing SMEs' on the back window.

“ Yes, it was my car that was parked at Rivonia Village since this morning. But it wasn't (only) my message. It is the message of every single small business owner in this country... And of course in support of Ubuntu Baba.

Read more here: <https://t.co/d50tkif2PK> [pic.twitter.com/aAEiCw0DvC](https://t.co/d50tkif2PK)— Mamus Broodryk (@mamusbroodryk) [January 8, 2019](#) ”

This is not the first time Woolworths has been accused of plagiarising designs. In 2013, artist, illustrator and designer Euodia Roets [claimed the retailer copied her hummingbird design](#) for its scatter cushions. And then in 2012, Woolworths was accused of [copying of KwaZulu-Natal-based Frankie's Olde Soft Drink Company's](#) range of retro cooldrinks. The Advertising Standards Authority ruled in favour of Frankie's and Woolworths had to remove the phrase 'Good Old Fashioned' from its vintage soda range.



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Woolworths has now scheduled a meeting with McLaughlin, set to take place today, to discuss the matter.

"We are taking this allegation extremely seriously and believe it wouldn't be appropriate to discuss the issue publicly before chatting to Ubuntu Baba first," a Woolworths spokesperson said in an emailed response to *Fin24*.

McLaughlin ends her post saying that as a South African manufacturer, they'd be happy to consider working together with Woolworths.

"I'd personally LOVE to see an ergonomic and safe baby carrier on the Woolies shelves, because I know how much of a difference babywearing can make, especially during those first few very tough months of bringing a baby into the world. That is, of course, why Ubuntu Baba exists," she wrote.

Read McLaughlin's [full blog post here](#).

For more:

[Oops Woolworse, you did it again!](#)

[Woman who says Woolworths copied her baby carrier design will not sue - but wants retailer to account Woolworths to meet with entrepreneur accusing it of 'blatantly expropriating' her idea](#)

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