

Bucket List

By Reg P. Wydeven
September 27, 2008

A trade secret can be one thing that separates a business from its competitors. That one nugget of knowledge that makes a company's product stronger, faster, lighter or just otherwise better can be worth millions of dollars.

That's why company's work so hard to protect their trade secrets. The law provides helpful tools to help protect trade secrets. Things like patents, copyrights, trade- and service marks all protect proprietary information. In addition, businesses can use non-disclosure, confidentiality or non-compete agreements with employees and other businesses they contract with to guard their confidential information.

Some businesses have trade secrets that are so valuable they take extra-protective precautions above and beyond what the law provides. Take, for example, Colonel Harland Sanders' secret original recipe of 11 herbs and spices. In 1940, Sanders developed the formula at his tiny restaurant in southeastern Kentucky and used it to launch the Kentucky Fried Chicken chain in the early 1950s.

Last month, for the first time in decades, officials removed the handwritten formula from KFC's corporate offices. While only temporary, the removal is to allow for security to be beefed up to guard the 68-year-old yellowing sheet of paper that contains one of the country's most famous corporate secrets.

Like something out of a Hollywood movie, the recipe was placed in a lock box that was handcuffed to security expert Bo Dietl, who climbed aboard an armored car that was escorted by off-duty police officers. For more than 20 years, the recipe has been tucked away in a filing cabinet equipped with two combination locks. To reach the cabinet, the keepers of the recipe would first open up a vault and unlock three locks on a door that stood in front of the cabinet. Vials of the herbs and spices are also stored in the secret filing cabinet.

Only two company executives ever have access to the Original Recipe at any one time. The company refuses to release their names or titles, and it uses multiple suppliers who produce and blend the ingredients but know only a part of the entire contents.

The extra security will hopefully avoid fowl play.