



BUSINESS

Trump Steaks, Wine, Water: Why Donald Doesn't Own Most Of Those Products

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SCOTT HORSLEY

Donald Trump pushed back against attacks on his business prowess this week, showing off examples of Trump-branded water, wine and steaks. But Trump's own ties to those products may not be as strong as he suggested.

KELLY MCEVERS, HOST:

Anyone tuning into Donald Trump's post-primary press conference last night could be forgiven for thinking they'd stumbled onto the Home Shopping Network. Trump used the national TV platform to defend his business reputation. NPR's Scott Horsley reports.

SCOTT HORSLEY, BYLINE: So there was a leading Republican presidential candidate onstage at a Trump-branded golf course promoting Trump-branded water, wine and steaks as if to reassure voters there's no problem with the size of his portfolio.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

DONALD TRUMP: So you have the water. You have the steaks. You have the airline that I sold. I mean, what's wrong with selling? Every once in a while, you can sell something. You have the wines and all of that.

HORSLEY: The infomercial was a calculated rebuttal to Mitt Romney's charge last week that Trump had overstated his business prowess, a key selling point in the billionaire's presidential campaign.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

MITT ROMNEY: Whatever happened to Trump Airlines? How about Trump University? And then there's Trump Magazine and Trump Vodka and Trump Steaks and Trump Mortgage. A business genius he is not.

HORSLEY: Whatever Trump is - a builder, dealmaker, star of his own nonstop reality show - he's also a salesman who rakes in millions of dollars by putting his name on a wide array of products, from neckties to cologne. A closer look at the Trump product showcase last night, however, suggests they may be more sizzle than steak.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

TRUMP: We have Trump Steaks, and by the way, you want to take one, we'll charge you about - what? - 50 bucks a steak. No, I won't.

(LAUGHTER)

HORSLEY: Where's the beef from? Those steaks bore the label of Bush Brothers Provision Company, a West Palm Beach vendor that merely supplies meat to Trump resorts. A Bush Brothers spokesman says Trump has no ownership stake in the business. OK, so what about Trump Water?

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

TRUMP: Well, it's a private little water company, and I supply the water for all my places. And it's good, but it's very good.

HORSLEY: Reporters who looked at that water, like Zeke Miller of Time Magazine, noticed it's bottled in Connecticut by a company called Village Springs. A spokeswoman there says the company supplies private-label water to many customers.

Donald Trump has no financial stake in the operation. She referred other questions to the Trump campaign which didn't respond to a request for comment.

Donald Trump built his reputation and much of his fortune as a successful developer, but in recent years, his business has largely morphed into licensing the Trump brand to others. According to Yahoo News, for example, Trump actually owns less than a third of the Manhattan buildings that bear his name. That's allowed Trump to profit from his growing celebrity without having to risk much of his own capital.

For many people, the Trump name implies quality and luxury, but they can end up disappointed when they learn the limits of Donald Trump's involvement. Trump's facing several lawsuits, for example, over the now-shuttered Trump University which promoted itself as teaching the billionaire's moneymaking secrets. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, a Democrat, argued in a CNN interview that the so-called university did not offer instructors hand-picked by Trump as advertised. Instead, the teachers came from retail and fast food.

ERIC SCHNEIDERMAN: If you tell people, we're going to teach you Donald Trump's secrets and he's never had any part of writing the curriculum, that's fraud.

HORSLEY: Schneiderman is seeking tens of millions of dollars in restitution. Last week, a New York appeals court ruled the case can go forward. Trump insists many students offered glowing reviews of the university and says he's eager to re-launch it once the lawsuits are resolved.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

TRUMP: I don't settle lawsuits - very rare - because once you settle lawsuits, everybody sues you - very simple.

HORSLEY: Trump did settle a lawsuit, though, over a failed condominium project in Baja, Calif. It was called Trump Ocean Resort, though Trump himself played almost no role in the development which was never completed and cost investors more than \$30 million. One unhappy investor told NPR he never would've bought into the property had he suspected Donald Trump was little more than a marketing gimmick. Scott Horsley, NPR News, Washington.

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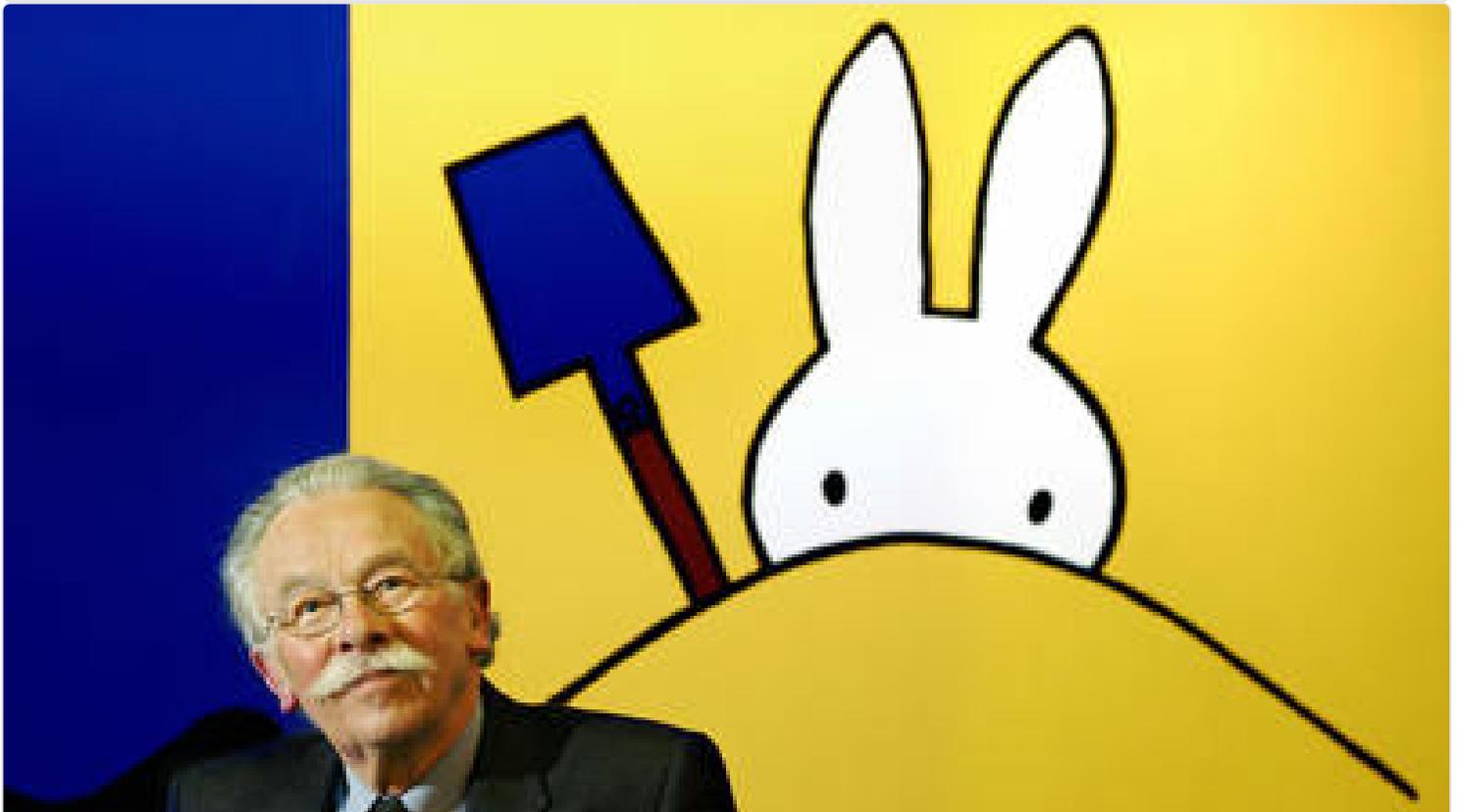
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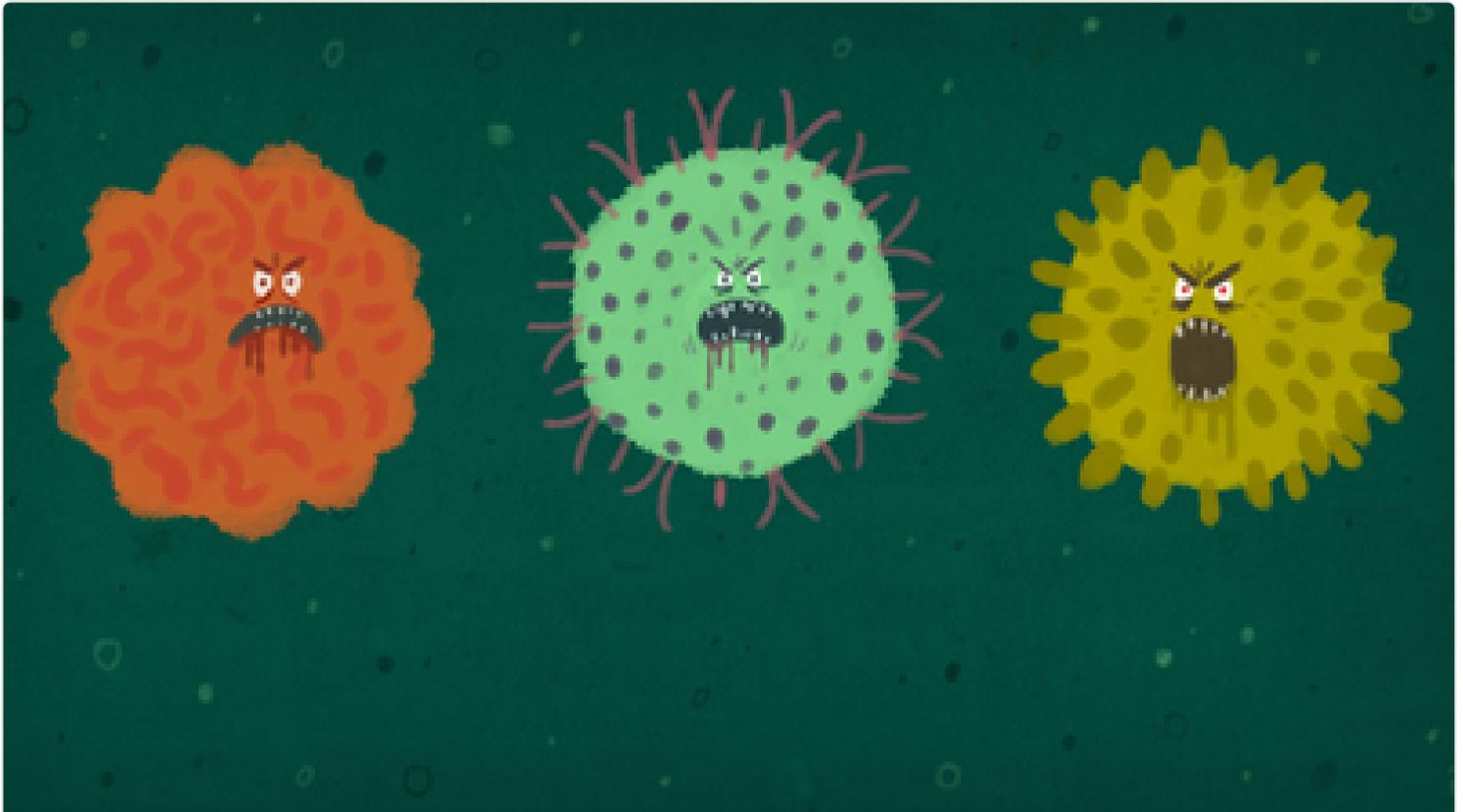
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