

Boca vacation company accuses manager of fraud

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Vacation Break U.S.A. has filed suit against its former telecommunications manager, alleging that he defrauded the company by submitting phony invoices from a kickback scheme with some of Vacation Break's vendors.

According to the lawsuit, Rick Wichelns was hired by the Fort Lauderdale company in July 1992 to handle the purchase of telephones and other communications equipment and related services.

Its phone system is Vacation Break's lifeblood. The company markets time-share units and vacation packages to consumers via a telemarketing network throughout the country.

The company claims Wichelns arranged for Vacation Break to pay several bogus corporations for telecommunications equipment — payments the company says ended up in Wichelns's own pocket.

He was fired by Vacation Break in December but continued to represent himself as being associated with the company, according to the suit filed in

Broward Circuit Court.

"We are currently investigating the allegations and intend to vigorously contest them every step of the way," said Kenneth Lipman, the Boca Raton attorney representing Wichelns.

Vacation Break officials had no additional comment on the lawsuit.

The company, which recently placed its name atop the Fort Lauderdale building that houses its headquarters, has fought hard to separate itself from past unscrupulous actions by other companies in the vacation telemarketing industry.