Microsoft’s fonts catch out another fraudster—this time in Canada

Enlarge / The Calibri font. Don’t use this if you’re forging anything written before 2007.
Peter Bright

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You’d think that people forging documents would have learned by now. Canadian Gerald McGoey was judged to have falsified documents in an attempt to protect certain assets from bankruptcy proceedings because—and stop me if you’ve heard this before—the documents used Microsoft’s modern “C” fonts, which didn’t become widely available until 2007. This would have been fine were it not for the minor detail that the documents were dated 2004 and 1995. Whoops.

McGoey was CEO of Look Communications when it collapsed and left him bankrupt. The company was liquidated, and McGoey was ordered to replay $5.6 million to creditors. McGoey claimed that the assets in question—homes, in this case—were held in trust by his wife and three children and hence beyond the reach of the courts. To prove this, he presented two signed documents. Unfortunately for him, he’d created the documents using typefaces that didn’t exist at the time of the documents’ purported creation.

The first trust document was dated 1995 and used the Cambria

font. The second, dated 2004, used Calibri. Cambria was designed in 2004, while Calibri was between 2002 and 2004. But neither became widespread until 2007, when they were bundled with Windows Vista and Office 2007. That software included seven different fonts with names beginning with “C”—the “C fonts”—that were optimized for ClearType antialiasing. With their release, Microsoft changed Word’s default font from the venerable Times New Roman to Calibri. Using the new fonts instantly betrays that a document wasn’t written any time prior to 2007.

This isn’t the first time that Microsoft’s switch has caught out fraudsters. In 2017, the family of former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif produced forged documents to justify the substantial fortune that Sharif had accumulated. Daughter Maryam Sharif presented a signed document dated to 2006 but made the same mistake as McGoey: she used Calibri.

And before that, in 2012 the Turkish government relied on documents written in Calibri and other C fonts to show that some 300 people were involved in a coup attempt. Only problem? The documents were dated 2003. Though the deceit was pointed out in court, it was to no avail, and the defendants were found guilty anyway.

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