

Decision for dispute CAC-UDRP-105640

Case number CAC-UDRP-105640

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Domain names arcelormittaleu.com

Case administrator

Organization Iveta Špiclová (Czech Arbitration Court) (Case admin)

Complainant

Organization ARCELORMITTAL

Complainant representative

Organization NAMESHIELD S.A.S.

Respondent

Organization organization

OTHER LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

The Panel is not aware of any other legal proceedings which are pending or decided and which relate to the disputed domain name.

IDENTIFICATION OF RIGHTS

The Complainant is the owner of the international trademark n° 947686 ARCELORMITTAL® registered on August 3, 2007.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The Complainant states that it is the largest steel producing company in the world and is the market leader in steel for use in automotive, construction, household appliances and packaging with 71.5 million tonnes crude steel made in 2020. It holds sizeable captive supplies of raw materials and operates extensive distribution networks. It has an international reputation and in its niche it is well-known as attested to by earlier cases entering awards transferring infringing domain names to its account. As ARCELORMITTAL® is exclusively associated with Complainant, and as Respondent has appropriated it for an unauthorized and infringing purpose, it lacks rights or legitimately interests in the disputed domain name and its registration is abusive and in violation of the UDRP.

The disputed domain name, <arcelormittaleu.com> (hereinafter, the Disputed Domain Name) was registered on July 13, 2023 and resolves to a registrar parking page with commercial links that make reference to Complainant's field of business.

PARTIES CONTENTIONS

COMPLAINANT:

Complainant contends that the Disputed Domain Name is confusingly similar to its 's trademark ARCELORMITTAL® and its domain name <arcelormittal.com> as it includes the Complainant's trademark in its entirety with the addition of the letters "e" and "u," the acronym for the European Union where Complainant is located.

The Disputed Domain Name resolves to a page of hyperlinks that make reference to Complainant's business and is clearly intended to attract Internet users to the website in the belief that it is sponsored by Complainant.

RESPONDENT:

NO ADMINISTRATIVELY COMPLIANT RESPONSE HAS BEEN FILED.

RIGHTS

The Complainant has, to the satisfaction of the Panel, shown the Disputed Domain Name is identical or confusingly similar to a trademark or service mark in which the Complainant has rights (within the meaning of paragraph 4(a)(i) of the Policy).

NO RIGHTS OR LEGITIMATE INTERESTS

The Complainant has, to the satisfaction of the Panel, shown the Respondent to have no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the Disputed Domain Name (within the meaning of paragraph 4(a)(ii) of the Policy).

BAD FAITH

The Complainant has, to the satisfaction of the Panel, shown the Disputed Domain Name has been registered and is being used in bad faith (within the meaning of paragraph 4(a)(iii) of the Policy).

PROCEDURAL FACTORS

The Panel is satisfied that all procedural requirements under UDRP were met and there is no other reason why it would be inappropriate to provide a decision.

PRINCIPAL REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Pursuant to the Policy, paragraph 4(a), a complainant must prove each of the following to justify the transfer of a domain name:

- (i) the domain name is identical or confusingly similar to a trademark or service mark in which the complainant has rights;
- (ii) the respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the domain name; and
- (iii) the respondent has registered and is using the domain name in bad faith.

In this case, the Czech Arbitration Court has employed the required measures to achieve actual notice of the Complaint to the Respondent, and the Respondent was given a fair opportunity to appear, rebut and defend its registration of the Disputed Domain Name.

By the Rules, paragraph 5(c)(i), it is expected of a respondent to: "Respond specifically to the statements and allegations contained in the complaint and include any and all bases for the Respondent (domain name holder) to retain registration and use of the disputed domain name ..." Notwithstanding Respondent's default Complainant is not relieved from the burden of establishing its claim. WIPO Overview of WIPO Panel Views on Selected UDRP Questions, 3.0, Sec. 4.3: "Noting the burden of proof on the complainant, a respondent's default (i.e., failure to submit a formal response) would not by itself mean that the complainant is deemed to have prevailed; a respondent's default is not necessarily an admission that the complainant's claims are true." However, if a complainant's adduced evidence supports any element of the Policy, a respondent has an opportunity to contest the contention that its registration and use of the challenged domain name was unlawful.

1. The Disputed Domain Name is confusingly similar to a trademark or service mark in which the Complainant has rights.

This first limb of the Policy requires Complainant to prove that it has a trademark right and that the disputed domain name is identical or confusingly similar to that mark. The Panel finds that Complainant has demonstrated that it has a registered trademark right to the term ARCELORMITTAL®. Having established that element of the Policy the next question is whether the disputed domain name is identical or confusingly similar to Complainant's mark. A side-by-side comparison of the Disputed Domain Name and the ARCELORMITTAL® trademark demonstrates that <arcelormittaleu.com> is confusingly similar to the mark in that it entirely incorporates Complainant's trademark. The additions of the letters "e" and "u" do not create a distinct name but suggest a relationship with Complainant. Cellular One Group v. Paul Brien, Case No. D2000-0028 <cellularonechina.com>. "EU" is simply a geographic term that highlights, in this case, Complainant's location.

At the threshold it is necessary only to consider "whether a domain name is similar enough in light of the purpose of the Policy to justify moving on to the other elements of a claim for cancellation or transfer of a domain name." The Panel in Nicole Kidman v. John Zuccarini, d/b/a Cupcake Party, D2000-1415 (WIPO January 23, 2001) notes that "numerous prior panels have held [the purposes of the Policy are satisfied] when a domain name wholly incorporates a complainant's registered mark." Similarly, Magnum Piering, Inc. v The Mudjacks and Garwood S. Wilson, Sr., D2000-1525 (WIPO January 21, 2001). Panelists generally disregard the top-level suffixes as functional necessities, thus the top-level extension is irrelevant in determining the issue under the first element of the Policy.

Having demonstrated that the Disputed Domain Name is confusingly similar to Complainant's ARCELORMITTAL® trademark the Panel finds Complainant has satisfied Para. 4(a)(i) of the Policy.

1. Rights and legitimate interests, Para. 4(a)(ii)

Under paragraph 4(a)(ii) of the Policy, a complainant has the burden of establishing that a respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests in respect of the disputed domain name, but this burden is light because only a respondent can answer the question for its motivation, and in this case, the Respondent has not appeared. Therefore, it is sufficient in the first instance for Complainant to allege a prima facie case, and if the evidence presented is persuasive or yields a positive inference that Respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests, the burden shifts to Respondent to rebut the allegations. This concept of shifting burdens is clearly explained in Croatia Airlines d.d. v. Modern Empire Internet Ltd., D2003-0455 (WIPO August 21, 2003) in which the Panel held that "[s]ince it is difficult to prove a negative ... especially where the Respondent, rather than complainant, would be best placed to have specific knowledge of such rights or interests—and since Paragraph 4(c) describes how a Respondent can demonstrate rights and legitimate interests, a Complainant's burden of proof on this element is light."

Once the complainant makes such a prima facie showing, "the burden of production shifts to the respondent, though the burden of proof always remains on the complainant. If the respondent fails to come forward with evidence showing rights or legitimate interests, the complainant will have sustained its burden under the second element of the UDRP," Malayan Banking Berhad v. Beauty, Success & Truth International, D2008-1393 (December 8, 2008). Finally, "in the absence of direct evidence, complainant and the panel must resort to reasonable inferences from whatever evidence is in the record," Euromarket Designs, Inc. v. Domain For Sale VMI, D2000-1195 (WIPO October 26, 2000).

In this case, Complainant contends that Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in the Disputed Domain Name, because Complainant did not authorize Respondent to acquire the Disputed Domain Name nor did it grant it any right to use the ARCELORMITTAL® trademark. The evidence in the record is conclusive that Respondent whose name in this case is withheld is not commonly known under the disputed domain name. See Skechers U.S.A., Inc. and Skechers U.S.A., Inc. II v. Chad Moston / Elite Media Group, FA1804001781783 (Forum May 11, 2018) ("Here, the WHOIS information of record identifies Respondent as "Chad Moston / Elite Media Group." The Panel therefore finds under Policy 114(c)(ii) that Respondent is not commonly known by the disputed domain name under Policy 114(c)(ii)"); Amazon Technologies, Inc. v. Suzen Khan / Nancy Jain / Andrew Stanzy, FA 1741129 (FORUM August 16, 2017) (finding that respondent had no rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain names when the identifying information provided by WHOIS was unrelated to the domain names or respondent's use of the same).

Once the burden shifts, Respondent has the opportunity of demonstrating its right or legitimate interest by showing the existence of any of the following nonexclusive circumstances:

- (i) before any notice to you [respondent] of the dispute, your use of, or demonstrable preparations to use, the domain name or a name corresponding to the domain name in connection with a bona fide offering of goods or services; or
- (ii) you [respondent] (as an individual, business, or other organization) have been commonly known by the domain name, even if you have acquired no trademark or service mark rights; or
- (iii) you [respondent] are making a legitimate noncommercial or fair use of the domain name, without intent for commercial gain to misleadingly divert consumers or to tarnish the trademark or service mark at issue.

If a respondent proves any of these circumstances or indeed anything else that shows it has a right or legitimate interest in the domain name, the complainant will have failed to discharge its onus and the respondent must succeed. However, where respondent fails to respond, the Panel must assess the record before it. Here, the choice of the domain name corresponds to the trademark. Therefore, Respondent's default and its failure to rebut Complainant's evidence is particularly telling. Since there is no proof otherwise, the record supports the conclusion that Respondent lacks any right or legitimate interest as measured by the three circumstances of paragraph 4(c). See Deutsche Telekom AG v. Britt Cordon, D2004-0487 (WIPO September 13, 2004) (holding that "once a complainant establishes a prima facie case that none of the three circumstances establishing legitimate interests or rights applies, the burden of production on this factor shifts to the Respondent. If the respondent cannot do so, a complainant is deemed to have satisfied paragraph 4(a)(ii) of the Policy). Similarly in Malayan Banking Berhad, supra. (holding that "[i]f the respondent fails to come forward with evidence showing rights or legitimate interests, the complainant will have sustained its burden under the second element of the UDRP.").

Accordingly, the Panel finds that the Respondent does not have rights or legitimate interests in the Disputed Domain Name. Thus, Complainant has satisfied Paragraph §4(a)(ii) of the Policy.

1. Registered and Used in Bad Faith, §4(a)(iii)

Having determined that Respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests, the Complainant must then prove on the balance of probabilities both that the Disputed Domain Name was registered in bad faith and that it is being used in bad faith. The consensus expressed in WIPO Overview 3.0, section 3.1.4. is that "the mere registration of a domain name that is identical or confusingly similar . . . to a famous or widely-known trademark by an unaffiliated entity can by itself create a presumption of bad faith." Particularly probative in this case is that Complainant holds the domain name <arcelormittal.com>. The Disputed Domain Name is virtually identical but included the geographic designation "EU." The addition of the letters "e" and "u", the acronym for the European Union, accentuate rather than distinguish the Disputed Domain Name from Complainant's online presence. Absent a cogent explanation from Respondent justifying its choice of domain name, this supports the conclusion that it registered the Disputed Domain Name with the purpose of taking advantage of the goodwill and reputation accruing to Complainant's trademark.

The Panel finds that the present case is one in which the presumption of bad faith is satisfied. The presumption is further strengthened by the strong inference of Respondent's actual knowledge of Complainant's and its ARCELORMITTAL® trademark and of its intention to take advantage of its attractive value on the Internet solely for the reason of its goodwill flowing from its widely known or famous brand.

Paragraph 4(b) of the Policy sets out four nonexclusive circumstances, any one of which is evidence of the registration and use of a domain name in bad faith, although other circumstances may also be relied on, as the four circumstances are not exclusive. The four specified circumstances are:

- (i) circumstances indicating that the respondent has registered or acquired the domain name primarily for the purpose of selling, renting, or otherwise transferring the domain name registration to the complainant who is the owner of the trademark or service mark or to a competitor of that complainant, for valuable consideration in excess of the respondent's documented out-of-pocket costs directly related to the domain name; or
- (ii) the respondent has registered the domain name in order to prevent the owner of the trademark or service mark from reflecting the mark in a corresponding domain name, provided that the respondent has engaged in a pattern of such conduct; or
- (iii) the respondent has registered the domain name primarily for the purpose of disrupting the business of a competitor; or
- (iv) by using the domain name, the respondent has intentionally attempted to attract, for commercial gain, Internet users to the respondent's website or other on-line location, by creating a likelihood of confusion with the complainant's mark as to the source, sponsorship, affiliation, or endorsement of the respondent's website or location or of a product or service on the site or location.

Of the four circumstances, the fourth most readily applies as the domain name is clearly intended to attract Internet users seeking to reach Complainant's website or purchase its products and services. The Disputed Domain Name in this case resolves to a page of hyperlinks that relate to Complainant's field of business. domain names in this case are passively held, but for no conceivably lawful use. National Football League v. Thomas Trainer, D2006-1440 (WIPO December 29, 2006) <nflnetwork.com> (holding that "when a registrant, such as respondent here, obtains a domain name that is [confusingly similar] to a famous mark, with no apparent rights or legitimate interests in the name, and then fails to respond to infringement claims and a UDRP Complaint, an inference of bad faith is warranted."

Where the facts demonstrate an intent to capitalize on an owner's mark in the manner in which Complainant describes and which is supported by proof in the record, the registration is prima facie abusive. Royal Bank of Canada - Banque Royale Du Canada v. Registration Private, Domains By Proxy, LLC / Randy Cass, D2019-2803 (WIPO February 23, 2020). "It is clear that where the facts of the case establish that the respondent's intent in registering or acquiring a domain name was to unfairly capitalize on the complainant's nascent . . . trademark, panels have been prepared to find the respondent acted in bad faith."). WIPO Overview 3.0, Sec. 3.3: "While panelists will look at the totality of the circumstances in each case, factors that have been considered relevant in applying the passive holding doctrine include: (i) the degree of distinctiveness or reputation of the complainant's mark, (ii) the failure of the respondent to . . . to provide any evidence of actual or contemplated good-faith use, . . . and (iv) the implausibility of any good faith use to which the domain name may be put." It is inconceivable that any use of the Disputed Domain Name could be lawful.

The Panel finds that the Complainant has shown that the Respondent registered and is using the Disputed Domain Name in bad faith both in general and in particular because the Respondent's conduct puts the case squarely within paragraph 4(b)(iv) as well as within the larger notion of abusive conduct. The Panel finds that Complainant has adduced more than sufficient evidence to prove Respondent's bad faith based on the foregoing considerations.

Accordingly, the Respondent has registered and used the Disputed Domain Name in bad faith and that its conduct firmly supports the conclusion that the registration of the Disputed Domain Name is abusive of Complainant's rights. Having thus demonstrated that Respondent registered and is using the Disputed Domain Name in bad faith, Complainant has also satisfied Paragraph 4(a)(iii) of the Policy.

FOR ALL THE REASONS STATED ABOVE, THE COMPLAINT IS

Accepted

AND THE DISPUTED DOMAIN NAME(S) IS (ARE) TO BE

1. arcelormittaleu.com: Transferred

PANELLISTS

Name **Gerald Levine Ph.D, Esq.**

DATE OF PANEL DECISION **2023-08-16**

Publish the Decision
