

ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION

Sanofi v. Terry Hull, Sanofi
Case No. D2023-2300

1. The Parties

The Complainant is Sanofi, France, represented by Selarl Marchais & Associés, France.

The Respondent is Terry Hull, Sanofi, Thailand.

2. The Domain Name and Registrar

The disputed domain name <sanofi-uk.com> (the “Domain Name”) is registered with eNom, LLC (the “Registrar”).

3. Procedural History

The Complaint was filed with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (the “Center”) on May 25, 2023. On May 26, 2023, the Center transmitted by email to the Registrar a request for registrar verification in connection with the Domain Name. On May 26, 2023, the Registrar transmitted by email to the Center its verification response disclosing registrant and contact information for the Domain Name which differed from the named Respondent (Whois Agent (837392283)) and contact information in the Complaint. The Center sent an email communication to the Complainant on June 2, 2023, providing the registrant and contact information disclosed by the Registrar, and inviting the Complainant to submit an amendment to the Complaint. The Complainant filed an amendment to the Complaint on June 6, 2023.

The Center verified that the Complaint together with the amendment to the Complaint satisfied the formal requirements of the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Policy” or “UDRP”), the Rules for Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Rules”), and the WIPO Supplemental Rules for Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Supplemental Rules”).

In accordance with the Rules, paragraphs 2 and 4, the Center formally notified the Respondent of the Complaint, and the proceedings commenced on June 8, 2023. In accordance with the Rules, paragraph 5, the due date for Response was June 28, 2023. The Respondent did not submit any response. Accordingly, the Center notified the Respondent’s default on June 29, 2023.

The Center appointed Nicholas Smith as the sole panelist in this matter on July 10, 2023. The Panel finds that it was properly constituted. The Panel has submitted the Statement of Acceptance and Declaration of Impartiality and Independence, as required by the Center to ensure compliance with the Rules, paragraph 7.

4. Factual Background

The Complainant is a French multinational pharmaceutical company headquartered in Paris. The Complainant engages in research and development, manufacturing and marketing of pharmaceutical products for sale, principally in the prescription market, but also develops over-the-counter medication. The Complainant and its predecessors in title have used Sanofi as a name and brand for over 30 years. The Complainant has operations in more than 100 countries employing 100,000 people and had sales of EUR 37.7 billion in 2021.

The Complainant and its predecessors in title have held trademark registrations for SANOFI (the “SANOFI Mark”) since at least 1988. Its trademark registrations for the SANOFI Mark cover a range of pharmaceutical products across jurisdictions, including United States of America registration number 4,178,199, registered July 24, 2012.

The Domain Name was registered on April 14, 2023, and does not resolve to an active website (rather it resolves to an “index” page).

5. Parties’ Contentions

A. Complainant

The Complainant contends that it has satisfied each of the elements required under the Policy for a transfer of the Domain Name.

Notably, the Complainant contends that;

- a) It is the owner of the SANOFI Mark, having registered the SANOFI Mark in the United States of America. The Domain Name is confusingly similar to the SANOFI Mark as it reproduces the SANOFI Mark in its entirety and adds the geographical abbreviation “uk” and a hyphen.
- b) There are no rights or legitimate interests held by the Respondent in respect of the Domain Name. The Complainant has not granted any license or authorization for the Respondent to use the SANOFI Mark. The Respondent is not commonly known by the SANOFI Mark, nor does it use the Domain Name for a *bona fide* purpose or legitimate noncommercial purpose. Indeed, the Domain Name does not resolve to an active webpage at all.
- c) The Domain Name was registered and is being used in bad faith. There is no plausible circumstance under which the Respondent could legitimately use the Domain Name, which combines the SANOFI Mark and the term “-uk”, other than in bad faith. Given the reputation of the highly distinctive SANOFI Mark, the Respondent must have been aware of the Complainant’s mark at the time of registration. In such circumstances, the Respondent’s passive holding of the Domain Name amounts to use of the Domain Name in bad faith.

B. Respondent

The Respondent did not reply to the Complainant’s contentions.

6. Discussion and Findings

A. Identical or Confusingly Similar

It is well accepted that the first element functions primarily as a standing requirement. The standing (or threshold) test for confusing similarity involves a reasoned but relatively straightforward comparison between the Complainant's trademark and the Domain Name. WIPO Overview of WIPO Panel Views on Selected UDRP Questions, Third Edition, ("[WIPO Overview 3.0](#)"), section 1.7.

Based on the available record, the Panel finds the Complainant has shown rights in respect of a trademark or service mark for the purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.2.1

The Panel finds the entirety of the mark is reproduced within the Domain Name. Accordingly, the Domain Name is identical or confusingly similar to the mark for the purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.7.

While the addition of other terms here, being "-uk", may bear on assessment of the second and third elements, the Panel finds the addition of such terms does not prevent a finding of confusing similarity between the Domain Name and the mark for the purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.8.

Based on the available record, the Panel finds the first element of the Policy has been established.

B. Rights or Legitimate Interests

Paragraph 4(c) of the Policy provides a list of circumstances in which the Respondent may demonstrate rights or legitimate interests in a disputed domain name.

While the overall burden of proof in UDRP proceedings is on the complainant, panels have recognized that proving a respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests in a domain name may result in the often impossible task of "proving a negative", requiring information that is often primarily within the knowledge or control of the respondent. As such, where a complainant makes out a *prima facie* case that the respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests, the burden of production on this element shifts to the respondent to come forward with relevant evidence demonstrating rights or legitimate interests in the domain name. If the respondent fails to come forward with such relevant evidence, the complainant is deemed to have satisfied the second element. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 2.1.

Having reviewed the record, the Panel finds the Complainant has established a *prima facie* case that the Respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests in the Domain Name. The Respondent has not rebutted the Complainant's *prima facie* showing and has not come forward with any relevant evidence demonstrating rights or legitimate interests in the Domain Name.

The Panel considers that the record of this case reflects that:

- before any notice to the Respondent of the dispute, the Respondent did not use, nor has it made 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. Paragraph 4(c)(i) of the Policy, and [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 2.2.
- the Respondent (as an individual, business, or other organization) has not been commonly known by the Domain Name. Paragraph 4(c)(ii) of the Policy, and [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 2.3.
- the Respondent is not 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. Paragraph 4(c)(iii) of the Policy, and [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 2.4.
- the record contains no other factors demonstrating rights or legitimate interests of the Respondent in the Domain Name.

The Panel notes that the Whois lists “Sanofi” as registrant of record. However, the Panel is not satisfied that the Respondent is actually commonly known under this name as opposed to simply registering the Domain Name under a pseudonym for the purpose of asserting rights or legitimate interests. The Respondent has provided no evidence that an entity known as “Sanofi” different to the Complainant exists and is operating a legitimate business. The mere fact that the name of a respondent appears from the Whois record to match the domain name, without additional affirmative evidence, does not lead to the conclusion that such a respondent is commonly known by the disputed domain name under Policy 4(c)(ii).

There is no evidence of any demonstrable preparations to use the Domain Name at all or any other evidence that would give rise to rights or legitimate interests in the Domain Name.

Based on the available record, the Panel finds the second element of the Policy has been established.

C. Registered and Used in Bad Faith

The Panel notes that for the purposes of paragraph 4(a)(iii) of the Policy, paragraph 4(b) of the Policy establishes circumstances, in particular but without limitation, that if found by the Panel to be present, shall be evidence of the registration and use of a domain name in bad faith.

The Panel considers that the record of this case reflects that there is no evidence of any use or demonstrable preparations to use the Domain Name.

UDRP panels have found that the non-use of a domain name (including a blank or “coming soon” page) would not prevent a finding of bad faith under the doctrine of passive holding. Having reviewed the record, the Panel finds the non-use of the Domain Name does not prevent a finding of bad faith in the circumstances of this proceeding. While UDRP 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 submit a response or to provide any evidence of actual or contemplated good-faith use, (iii) the respondent’s concealing its identity or use of false contact details (noted to be in breach of its registration agreement), and (iv) the implausibility of any good faith use to which the disputed domain name may be put. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.3.

Having reviewed the record, the Panel notes the distinctiveness or reputation of the Complainant’s trademark and the composition of the Domain Name, and finds that in the circumstances of this case the passive holding of the Domain Name does not prevent a finding of bad faith under the Policy. Indeed, the Panel finds on the balance of probabilities that given the nature of the Domain Name, wholly incorporating the well-known SANOFI Mark, and the absence of any explanation, the Domain Name is most likely being held pending use as website or email address that, without the license of the Complainant, will offer or make reference to the Complainant in an illicit manner for the Respondent’s commercial gain.

Based on the available record, the Panel finds the third element of the Policy has been established.

7. Decision

For the foregoing reasons, in accordance with paragraphs 4(i) of the Policy and 15 of the Rules, the Panel orders that the Domain Name <sanofi-uk.com> be cancelled.

/Nicholas Smith/

Nicholas Smith

Sole Panelist

Date: July 24, 2023