

ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION

Naterra International, Inc. v. 宋志涛 (ZhiTao Song)
Case No. D2023-5092

1. The Parties

The Complainant is Naterra International, Inc., United States of America (“United States”), represented by Carstens, Allen & Gourley, LLP, United States.

The Respondent is 宋志涛 (ZhiTao Song), China.

2. The Domain Name and Registrar

The disputed domain name <treehut.us.com> is registered with Chengdu West Dimension Digital Technology Co., Ltd. (the “Registrar”).

3. Procedural History

The Complaint was filed in English with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (the “Center”) on December 6, 2023. On December 7, 2023, the Center transmitted by email to the Registrar a request for registrar verification in connection with the disputed domain name. On December 8, 2023, the Registrar transmitted by email to the Center its verification response disclosing registrant and contact information for the disputed domain name which differed from the named Respondent (Redacted for Privacy) and contact information in the Complaint. The Center sent an email communication to the Complainant on December 11, 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 amended Complaint in English on December 14, 2023.

On December 11, 2023, the Center informed the Parties in Chinese and English, that the language of the registration agreement for the disputed domain name is Chinese. On December 14, 2023, the Complainant requested English to be the language of the proceeding. The Respondent did not submit any comment on the Complainant’s submission.

The Center verified that the Complaint together with the amended 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 in English and Chinese of the Complaint, and the proceedings commenced on December 21, 2023. In accordance with the Rules, paragraph 5, the due date for Response was January 10, 2024. The Respondent did not submit any response. Accordingly, the Center notified the Respondent's default on January 11, 2024.

The Center appointed Karen Fong as the sole panelist in this matter on January 26, 2024. 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, formed in 1994 in Texas, United States, is a producer of skin care products, one of which is sold under the brand TREE HUT. TREE HUT products are known for being formulated with plant-based ingredients and without parabens and sulphates. TREE HUT products have been featured in many leading American publications including Cosmopolitan, Style, Allure, People, and Glamour. The Complainant has been using the TREE HUT mark since 2002. The Complainant's own website for its TREE HUT products is at the domain name <treehutshea.com>.

The Complainant has trade mark registrations for TREE HUT in many countries around the world including the following:

- United States Trade Mark Registration No. 2667257 for TREE HUT registered on December 24, 2002;
- Chinese Trade Mark Registration No. 16902582 for TREE HUT registered on December 28, 2016;
- European Union Trade Mark Registration No. 3883618 for TREE HUT registered on September 22, 2005;

(together, individually and collectively referred to as the "Trade Mark").

The Respondent appears to be based in China. The disputed domain name was registered on October 12, 2023. The disputed domain name is connected to a website which bears the Trade Mark, mimics the Complainant's own website including using its images, and purportedly offers for sale merchandise that bears the Trade Mark at discounted prices and that purports to be the Complainant's products (the "Website"). According to a blog, it appears that some consumers who purchased these products failed to receive the products which they paid for.

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 disputed domain name.

Notably, the Complainant contends that the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to the Trade Mark, that the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests with respect to the disputed domain name, and that the disputed domain name was registered and is being used in bad faith. The Complainant requests transfer of the disputed domain name.

B. Respondent

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

6. Discussion and Findings

6.1 Preliminary Issue: Language of the Proceeding

The language of the Registration Agreement for the disputed domain names is Chinese. Pursuant to the Rules, paragraph 11(a), in the absence of an agreement between the parties, or unless specified otherwise in the registration agreement, the language of the administrative proceeding shall be the language of the registration agreement.

The Complaint was filed in English. The Complainant requested that the language of the proceeding be English as the Website is entirely in the English language. It is targeted to English speaking consumers and the FAQ page states that the Respondent only ships its products to the United States. These are indications that the Respondent is familiar with the English language. Further the Complainant having to translate the Complaint into Chinese would unfairly disadvantage and burden the Complainant in terms of costs and delay the proceeding and adjudication of this matter.

The Respondent has not challenged the Complainant's language request and in fact has failed to file a response in either English or Chinese.

In exercising its discretion to use a language other than that of the registration agreement, the Panel has to exercise such discretion judicially in the spirit of fairness and justice to both parties, taking into account all relevant circumstances of the case, including matters such as the parties' ability to understand and use the proposed language, time and costs (see WIPO Overview of WIPO Panel Views on Selected UDRP Questions, Third Edition ("[WIPO Overview 3.0](#)"), section 4.5.1).

Having considered all the matters above, the Panel determines under paragraph 11(a) of the Rules that the language of the proceeding shall be English.

6.2 Substantive Issues

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 trade mark and the disputed domain name. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.7.

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

The Panel finds the entirety of the Trade Mark is reproduced within the disputed domain name. Accordingly, the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to the Trade Mark for the purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.7.

While the addition of the other term here "us" after the Trade Mark in the disputed domain name may bear on assessment of the second and third elements, the Panel finds the addition of such term does not prevent a finding of confusing similarity between the disputed domain name and the Trade 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 disputed 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 disputed domain name such as those enumerated in the Policy or otherwise.

Moreover, the nature of the disputed domain name is inherently misleading as it effectively impersonates or suggests sponsorship or endorsement by the Complainant. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 2.5.1.

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.

In the present case, the Panel notes that the Respondent must have been aware of the Trade Mark when he registered the disputed domain name given the Trade Mark was registered prior to registration of the disputed domain name, the reputation of the Trade Mark and the fact that the Website is an impersonation website. It is therefore implausible that the Respondent was unaware of the Complainant when he registered the disputed domain name.

In the [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.2.2 states as follows:

“Noting the near instantaneous and global reach of the Internet and search engines, and particularly in circumstances where the complainant’s mark is widely known (including in its sector) or highly specific and a respondent cannot credibly claim to have been unaware of the mark (particularly in the case of domainers), panels have been prepared to infer that the respondent knew, or have found that the respondent should have known, that its registration would be identical or confusingly similar to a complainant’s mark. Further factors including the nature of the domain name, the chosen top-level domain, any use of the domain name, or any respondent pattern, may obviate a respondent’s claim not to have been aware of the complainant’s mark.”

The fact that there is a clear absence of rights or legitimate interests coupled with the Respondent’s choice of the disputed domain name without any explanation is also a significant factor to consider (as stated in [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.2.1). The disputed domain name falls into the category stated above and the Panel finds that registration is in bad faith. The addition of the term “us” after the Trade Mark further reflects that the Respondent had the Complainant in mind when registering the disputed domain name as “US” is the acronym for the United States which is where the Complainant is based.

The disputed domain name is also being used in bad faith. The Website does not contain any disclaimer disclosing (the lack of) the relationship between the Parties. The unauthorised impersonation of the Complainant’s website offering for sale discounted products bearing the Trade Mark is a clear indication of use for illegal activity considering the price differential and there being no relationship between the Parties.

The blog shows that the products sold are counterfeit and/or unauthorized and in some cases, it appears that no products have been delivered after payment.

The content of the Website is calculated to give the impression it has been authorized by or connected to the Complainant when this is not the case. The Website was set up to deliberately mislead Internet users that it is connected to, authorised by, or affiliated with the Complainant. From the above, the Panel concludes that the Respondent has intentionally attempted to attract, for commercial gain, by misleading Internet users into believing that the Respondent's Website is and the products sold on it are those of or authorised or endorsed by the Complainant.

The Panel therefore finds that the disputed domain name has been registered and is being used in bad faith under paragraph 4(b)(iv) of the Policy.

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 disputed domain name <treehutus.com> be transferred to the Complainant.

/Karen Fong/

Karen Fong

Sole Panelist

Date: February 21, 2024