

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION**

Association des Centres Distributeurs E. Leclerc ACD Lec v. valerie connect  
Case No. D2023-1487

### **1. The Parties**

The Complainant is Association des Centres Distributeurs E. Leclerc ACD Lec, France, represented by Inlex IP Expertise, France.

The Respondent is valerie connect<sup>1</sup>, France.

### **2. The Domain Name and Registrar**

The disputed domain name <e-leclercs.com> is registered with NameCheap, Inc. (the “Registrar”).

### **3. Procedural History**

The Complaint was filed with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (the “Center”) on April 5, 2023. On April 5, 2023, the Center transmitted by email to the Registrar a request for registrar verification in connection with the disputed domain name. On April 5, 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, Privacy service provided by Withheld for Privacy ehf) and contact information in the Complaint. The Center sent an email communication to the Complainant on April 6, 2023 providing the registrant and contact information disclosed by the Registrar, and inviting the Complainant to submit an amended Complaint. The Complainant filed an amended Complaint on April 6, 2023.

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 of the Complaint, and the proceedings commenced on April 11, 2023. In accordance with the Rules, paragraph 5,

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<sup>1</sup> The Complaint against this Respondent was originally filed against “Redacted for Privacy”, as found in the publicly available WhoIs details for the disputed domain name. The identity of the Respondent was subsequently disclosed by the Registrar in response to the Center’s request for registrar verification in connection with the disputed domain name. The amended Complaint lists the person disclosed by the Registrar as the Respondent.

the due date for Response was May 1, 2023. The Respondent did not submit any response. Accordingly, the Center notified the Respondent's default on May 3, 2023.

The Center appointed Louis-Bernard Buchman as the sole panelist in this matter on May 11, 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 the French Association of E. Leclerc Distribution Centers, which has grown in France and in other European countries since the first store under the E. Leclerc name was opened by its founder Edouard Leclerc 70 years ago. The Complainant now operates 721 supermarkets and hypermarkets in France and around 100 in other European countries, with about 133,000 employees and a turnover in 2019 of EUR 48.2 billion. The Complainant is a leader of large-scale distribution in France.

The Complainant owns a large portfolio of registered trademarks containing the term E LECLERC, including, *inter alia*, the European Union Trade Mark No. 002700664, registered on January 31, 2005, and the European Union Trade Mark No. 011440807, registered on May 27, 2013 (together hereinafter referred to as "the Mark").

It also owns numerous domain names, including the <e-leclerc.com> domain name.

The Complainant provided evidence that MX servers have been configured under the disputed domain name.

The disputed domain name was registered on March 20, 2023 and resolved to the official website of the Complainant.

#### **5. Parties' Contentions**

##### **A. Complainant**

- (i) The Complainant submits that the disputed domain name reproduces the Mark, in which it has rights, and is confusingly similar to the Mark insofar as the disputed domain name contains the Mark in its entirety and that the addition of a final letter "s" after the Mark is not capable of dispelling the confusing similarity.
- (ii) The Complainant contends that the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the disputed domain name. Furthermore, the Complainant contends that it never authorized the Respondent to use the Mark in any manner and that the Respondent has never had any affiliation with the Complainant.
- (iii) The Complainant submits that the Respondent has registered the disputed domain name in bad faith. The Complainant alleges that the Respondent had knowledge of the Mark when registering the disputed domain name.
- (iv) The Complainant submits that the Respondent is using the disputed domain name in bad faith.
- (v) The Complainant requests that the disputed domain name be transferred to the Complainant.

## **B. Respondent**

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

## **6. Discussion and Findings**

### **6.1. Procedural Aspects - Failure to respond**

As aforementioned, no Response was received from the Respondent.

Under the Rules, paragraphs 5(f) and 14(a), the effect of a default by the Respondent is that, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, the Panel shall proceed to a decision on the basis of the Complaint.

Under paragraph 4(a) of the Policy, it is the Complainant's burden to establish that all three of the required criteria for a transfer of the disputed domain name have been met, even in the event of a default.

Under paragraph 14(b) of the Rules, the Panel is empowered to draw such inferences from the Respondent's default as it considers appropriate under the circumstances.

In this case, the Panel finds that as a result of the default, the Respondent has failed to rebut any of the reasonable factual assertions that are made and supported by evidence submitted by the Complainant. In particular, by defaulting and failing to respond, the Respondent has failed to offer the Panel any of the types of evidence set forth in paragraph 4(c) of the Policy or otherwise, from which the Panel might conclude that the Respondent has any rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name, such as making legitimate noncommercial or fair use of the disputed domain name.

Moreover, as discussed below, the Respondent has failed to provide any exculpatory information or reasoning that might have led the Panel to question the Complainant's arguments that the Respondent has acted in bad faith.

### **6.2. Requirements of paragraph 4(a) of the Policy**

#### **A. Identical or Confusingly Similar**

In comparing the Mark with the disputed domain name, it is evident that the latter consists of the Mark, with a hyphen between the "e" and "leclerc", followed by the letter "s" and the generic Top-Level Domain ("gTLD") ".com".

It is well established that a gTLD does not generally affect the assessment of a domain name for the purpose of determining identity or confusingly similarity. See section 1.11.1 of the WIPO Overview of WIPO Panel Views on Selected UDRP Questions, Third Edition ("[WIPO Overview 3.0](#)").

The Panel finds that the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to the Mark, which is incorporated in its entirety, and that the addition of the "s" final letter in the disputed domain name does not prevent a finding of confusing similarity, the Mark remaining recognizable within the disputed domain name. See section 1.8 of the [WIPO Overview 3.0](#).

Thus, the Complainant has satisfied the requirement of paragraph 4(a)(i) of the Policy.

#### **B. Rights or Legitimate Interests**

Although a complainant bears the ultimate burden of establishing all three elements of paragraph 4(a) of the Policy, UDRP panels have recognized that with regard to paragraph 4(a)(ii) of the Policy, this could result in

the often impossible task of proving a negative proposition, requiring information that is primarily, if not exclusively, within the knowledge of a respondent.

Thus, the consensus view of UDRP panels is that paragraph 4(c) of the Policy shifts the burden of production of evidence to the respondent to come forward with evidence of rights or legitimate interests in a domain name, once a complainant has made a *prima facie* showing, as the Panel believes the Complainant has made in this case. See *Document Technologies, Inc. v. International Electronic Communications Inc.*, WIPO Case No. [D2000-0270](#) and section 2.1 of the [WIPO Overview 3.0](#).

As previously noted, the Respondent offered no reason for selecting the disputed domain name.

There is no evidence that the Respondent is known by the disputed domain name or uses (or has made *bona fide* preparations to use) the disputed domain name in a business.

The disputed domain name directs the public to the official website of the Complainant.

No information is provided on what rights or legitimate interests the Respondent may have in the disputed domain name.

To counter any notion that the Respondent has such rights or legitimate interests, the Complainant has argued that the Respondent (i) has no affiliation with the Complainant and (ii) received no authorization from the Complainant to register or use the disputed domain name.

In addition, the nature of the disputed domain name, comprising the Complainant's trademark in its entirety, including a hyphen and the final letter "s", and the use of the disputed domain name to resolve to the Complainant's website carries a risk of Internet user confusion.

In the circumstances, the Panel concludes that the Complainant has established the requirement of paragraph 4(a)(ii) of the Policy with respect to the disputed domain name.

### **C. Registered and Used in Bad Faith**

As noted above, the Respondent has failed to provide any exculpatory information or persuasive reasoning that might have led the Panel to question the Complainant's arguments that the Respondent acted in bad faith by creating confusion to the detriment of the Complainant by registering the disputed domain name.

First, the registration of a domain name that is confusingly similar to a trademark by an entity that has no relationship to that mark may be, depending on the circumstances, evidence of opportunistic bad faith. See *Ebay Inc. v. Wangming*, WIPO Case No. [D2006-1107](#); *Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin, Maison Fondée en 1772 v. The Polygenix Group Co.*, WIPO Case No. [D2000-0163](#).

Second, it was established in prior UDRP decisions that where the respondent knew or should have known of a trademark prior to registering the disputed domain name, such conduct may be, in certain circumstances, evidence of bad faith registration. See *Weetabix Limited v. Mr. J. Clarke*, WIPO Case No. [D2001-0775](#).

In this case, considering the evidence provided by the Complainant that numerous UDRP panels have found that the Mark is well known and that the disputed domain name directed the public to the Complainant's official website, the Panel finds that it is impossible to believe that the Respondent, who is apparently located in France, chose to register the disputed domain name randomly with no knowledge of the Mark. See *Barney's Inc. v. BNY Bulletin Board*, WIPO Case No. [D2000-0059](#); *Kate Spade, LLC v. Darmstadter Designs*, WIPO Case No. [D2001-1384](#), citing *Cellular One Group v. Paul Brien*, WIPO Case No. [D2000-0028](#); and *Semcorp Industries Limited v. Hu Huan Xin*, WIPO Case No. [D2001-1092](#).

In addition, MX servers were configured on the disputed domain name, with the subsequent risk of phishing activities, further suggesting bad faith in the use of the disputed domain name.

Furthermore, the Panel notes that many UDRP panels have held that bad faith use of a domain name by a respondent may result from the fact its good faith use is in no way plausible (see *Audi AG v. Hans Wolf*, WIPO Case No. [D2001-0148](#)), considering the specificity of the retail activity.

The Panel notes that the Respondent has submitted no evidence of any good faith use of the disputed domain name and finds it is not possible to imagine any plausible future active use of the disputed domain name that would not be illegitimate. The Panel finds that the Respondent registered the disputed domain name to attract, for commercial gain, Internet users to its website by creating a likelihood of confusion with the Complainant's Mark.

Finally, some UDRP panels have held that in certain circumstances, registrants of domain names have an affirmative duty to abstain from registering and using a domain name, which is either identical or confusingly similar to a prior trademark held by others and that contravening that duty may constitute bad faith. See Policy, paragraph 2(b); *Nike, Inc. v. Ben de Boer*, WIPO Case No. [D2000-1397](#); *Nuplex Industries Limited v. Nuplex*, WIPO Case No. [D2007-0078](#); *Mobile Communication Service Inc. v. WebReg, RN*, WIPO Case No. [D2005-1304](#); *BOUYGUES v. Chengzhang, Lu Ciagao*, WIPO Case No. [D2007-1325](#); *Media General Communications, Inc. v. Rarenames, WebReg*, WIPO Case No. [D2006-0964](#); and *mVisible Technologies, Inc. v. Navigation Catalyst Systems, Inc.*, WIPO Case No. [D2007-1141](#).

The Panel concludes in the light of all these circumstances that the Respondent's registration and use of the disputed domain name constitute bad faith, and that the requirement of paragraph 4(a)(iii) of the Policy is also satisfied in this case.

## 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, <e-leclercs.com>, be transferred to the Complainant.

*/Louis-Bernard Buchman/*

**Louis-Bernard Buchman**

Sole Panelist

Date: May 19, 2023