

ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION

Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG v. Jesse Pinkman
Case No. D2023-4399

1. The Parties

The Complainant is Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG, Germany, represented by Bardehle Pagenberg Partnerschaft mbB, Germany.

The Respondent is Jesse Pinkman, India.

2. The Domain Name and Registrar

The disputed domain name <sennheiser-hearings.com> is registered with Cosmotown, Inc. (the “Registrar”).

3. Procedural History

The Complaint was filed with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (the “Center”) on October 24, 2023. On October 24, 2023, the Center transmitted by email to the Registrar a request for registrar verification in connection with the disputed domain name. On October 25, 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 (N/A) and contact information in the Complaint. The Center sent an email communication to the Complainant on October 26, 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 October 27, 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 October 30, 2023. In accordance with the Rules, paragraph 5, the due date for Response was November 19, 2023. The Respondent did not submit any formal response. The Respondent sent email communications to the Center on October 30, and November 24, 2023. Accordingly, the Center notified the Commencement of Panel Appointment Process on November 24, 2023.

The Center appointed Edoardo Fano as the sole panelist in this matter on November 28, 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.

The Panel has not received any requests from the Complainant or the Respondent regarding further submissions, waivers or extensions of deadlines, and the Panel has not found it necessary to request any further information from the Parties.

Having reviewed the communication records in the case file provided by the Center, the Panel finds that the Center has discharged its responsibility under the Rules, paragraph 2(a), "to employ reasonably available means calculated to achieve actual notice to [the] Respondent". Therefore, the Panel shall issue its Decision based upon the Complaint, the Policy, the Rules and the Supplemental Rules and without the benefit of a formal response from the Respondent.

The language of the proceeding is English, being the language of the Registration Agreement, as per paragraph 11(a) of the Rules.

4. Factual Background

The Complainant is Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG, a German company operating in the audio technology field, and owning several trademark registrations for SENNHEISER, among which:

- International Trademark Registration No. 670839 for SENNHEISER, registered on March 6, 1997;
- European Union Trade Mark Registration No. 000370122 for SENNHEISER, registered on August 27, 1999;
- International Trademark Registration No. 590780 for SENNHEISER and design, registered on August 10, 1992.

The Complainant also operates on the Internet, its main website being "www.sennheiser.com".

The Complainant provided evidence in support of the above.

According to the Whois records, the disputed domain name was registered on September 8, 2023, and it directs to an inactive website. However, before the Complaint was filed the disputed domain name resolved to a website in which the Complainant's trademark and logo were reproduced, pretending to be a Complainant's official website.

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 states that the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to its trademark SENNHEISER, as the disputed domain name wholly contains the Complainant's trademark with the addition of the generic term "hearings".

Moreover, the Complainant asserts that the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the disputed domain name since it has not been authorized by the Complainant to register the disputed domain

name or to use its trademark within the disputed domain name, it is not commonly known by the disputed domain name and it is not making either a *bona fide* offering of goods or services or a legitimate noncommercial or fair use of the disputed domain name. The disputed domain name resolved to a website in which the Complainant's trademark and logo were reproduced, pretending to be a Complainant's official website.

The Complainant submits that the Respondent has registered the disputed domain name in bad faith, since the Complainant's trademark SENNHEISER is distinctive and well known in the audio technology field. Therefore, the Respondent targeted the Complainant's trademark at the time of registration of the disputed domain name and the Complainant contends that the use of the disputed domain name to impersonate the Complainant and attract, for commercial gain, Internet users to the Respondent's website, creating a likelihood of confusion with the Complainant's trademark as to the source, sponsorship, affiliation, or endorsement of the Respondent's website, qualifies as bad faith registration and use.

B. Respondent

The Respondent has made no formal reply to the Complainant's contentions. However, as noted above, the Respondent sent the following informal email communications to the Center:

"hey what is this about ?" (October 30, 2023);

"what are you talking about? hell i have no idea" (November 24, 2023).

A respondent is not obliged to participate in a proceeding under the Policy, but if it fails to submit a formal response, reasonable facts asserted by a complainant may be taken as true, and appropriate inferences, in accordance with paragraph 14(b) of the Rules, may be drawn. See WIPO Overview of WIPO Panel Views on Selected UDRP Questions, Third Edition ("[WIPO Overview 3.0](#)"), section 4.3.

6. Discussion and Findings

Paragraph 4(a) of the Policy lists three elements, which the Complainant must satisfy in order to succeed:

- (i) the disputed domain name is identical or confusingly similar to a trademark or service mark in which the Complainant has rights; and
- (ii) the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the disputed domain name; and
- (iii) the disputed domain name has been registered and is being used in bad faith.

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 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 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 disputed domain name. Accordingly, the disputed domain name is 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 "hearings", 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 disputed domain name and the mark for the purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.8.

It is also well accepted that a generic Top-Level Domain, in this case “.com”, is typically ignored when assessing the similarity between a trademark and a domain name. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.11.1.

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.

Panels have held that the use of a domain name for illegal activity, here impersonation/passing off, can never confer rights or legitimate interests on a respondent. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 2.13.1.

Moreover, the Panel finds that the composition of the disputed domain name carries a risk of implied affiliation 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, regarding the registration in bad faith of the disputed domain name, the reputation of the Complainant’s trademark SENNHEISER in the audio technology field is clearly established, and the Panel finds that the Respondent must have known of the Complainant, and deliberately registered the disputed domain name in bad faith, especially because in the website at the disputed domain name the Complainant’s trademark and logo were reproduced, pretending to be a Complainant’s official website.

The Panel further notes that the disputed domain name was also being used in bad faith since the Respondent was trying to attract Internet users to its website by creating likelihood of confusion with the Complainant’s trademark as to the disputed domain name’s source, sponsorship, affiliation or endorsement, an activity clearly detrimental to the Complainant’s business.

Panels have held that the use of a domain name for illegal activity, here impersonation/passing off, constitutes bad faith. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.4. Having reviewed the record, the Panel finds the Respondent’s registration and use of the disputed domain name constitutes bad faith under the Policy.

The above suggests to the Panel that the Respondent intentionally registered and was using the disputed domain name in order both to disrupt the Complainant's business, and to attract Internet users to its website in accordance with paragraph 4(b)(iv) of the Policy.

As regards the current use of the disputed domain name, directing to and inactive website, 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 disputed domain name does not prevent a finding of bad faith in the circumstances of this proceeding. 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 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 domain name may be put. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.3. Having reviewed the record, the Panel notes the distinctiveness and reputation of the Complainant's trademark, the composition of the disputed domain name, and the failure of the Respondent to submit a formal response and finds that in the circumstances of this case the passive holding of the disputed domain name does not prevent a finding of bad faith under the Policy.

Furthermore, the Panel considers that the nature of the inherently misleading disputed domain name, which includes the Complainant's trademark in its entirety with the mere addition of the term "hearings", namely referring to the Complainant's field of activity, further supports a finding of bad faith. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.2.1.

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, <sennheiser-hearings.com>, be transferred to the Complainant.

/Edoardo Fano/

Edoardo Fano

Sole Panelist

Date: December 12, 2023