

ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION

Sazerac Brands, LLC v. Teghen Lesley
Case No. D2026-2476

1. The Parties

Complainant is Sazerac Brands, LLC, United States of America (“United States”), represented by Dorsey & Whitney LLP, United States.

Respondent is Teghen Lesley, United States.

2. The Domain Name and Registrar

The disputed domain name <sazeracbuffalotracemembers.com> is registered with Hostinger Operations, UAB (the “Registrar”).

3. Procedural History

The Complaint was filed with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (the “Center”) on June 8, 2026. On June 9, 2026, the Center transmitted by email to the Registrar a request for registrar verification in connection with the disputed domain name. On June 9, 2026, 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 (UNKNOWN) and contact information in the Complaint. The Center sent an email communication to Complainant on June 11, 2026, providing the registrant and contact information disclosed by the Registrar, and inviting Complainant to submit an amendment to the Complaint. Complainant filed an amended Complaint on June 11, 2026.

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 Respondent of the Complaint, and the proceedings commenced on June 15, 2026. In accordance with the Rules, paragraph 5, the due date for Response was July 5, 2026. Respondent did not submit any response. Accordingly, the Center notified Respondent’s default on July 6, 2026.

The Center appointed Georges Nahitchevansky as the sole panelist in this matter on July 10, 2026. 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

Complainant, Sazerac Brands, LLC, is a spirits and beverage company based in the United States. Complainant owns and operates a distillery in Frankfort, Kentucky, United States known as the Buffalo Trace Distillery and produces a brand of whiskey under the name and mark BUFFALO TRACE. Complainant also owns and uses the name and mark SAZERAC in connection with some of its other rye whiskey products and related products and services.

Complainant owns trademarks registrations for its SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE marks in the United States. They include, inter alia, registrations for (i) SAZERAC (No. 3001691, 4396428 and 6201251) the earliest of which issued to registration on September 27, 2005, and (ii) BUFFALO TRACE (No. 2294792, 4859200 and 6952959) the earliest of which issued to registration on November 23, 1999.

Respondent, who appears to be based in San Francisco, California, United States, registered the disputed domain name on January 6, 2026. At some point thereafter, Respondent used the disputed domain name for a web page that features the title "Connect with the Buffalo Trace community" and prompts users to join Facebook groups with the names "Sazerac Buffalo Trace Members" and "Sazerac Buffalo Trace Daily Odds Crews." Currently, the disputed domain name still resolves to that website.

5. Parties' Contentions

A. Complainant

Complainant contends that it is one of the largest and oldest spirits and beverage companies in the United States and that its Buffalo Trace Distilleries is highly regarded internationally, having won many awards. Complainant further contends that its SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE brands are well known and that through its use and registration of those brands Complainant has strong rights in such.

Complainant maintains that the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to its SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE marks as the disputed domain name fully incorporates these marks with the descriptive term "members" and the non-distinguishing ".com" extension.

Complainant asserts that Respondent does not have rights or legitimate interest in the disputed domain name as Respondent (i) is not a licensee of Complainant and has no relationship or affiliation with Complainant, (ii) is not commonly known by the names and marks SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE, and (iii) has used the disputed domain name "to impersonate Complainant, or at the very least create an improper association in order to drive traffic" to Respondent's Facebook groups that are not affiliated with Complainant. In that regard, Complainant notes that Respondent holds an associated Instagram profile with a link to the website at the disputed domain name wherein Respondent purports to be a tour guide at Complainant's Buffalo Trace Distillery.

Lastly, Complainant argues that Respondent registered and has used the disputed domain name in bad faith as Respondent is using the disputed domain name to pass itself off as Complainant, or at the very least to create an improper affiliation, in order to divert web traffic to Respondent's Facebook groups for Respondent's commercial gain. Complainant contends that the website at the disputed domain name prompts users to "Connect with the Buffalo Trace community" by accessing various Facebook groups that purport to provide information on Complainant and its distillery "straight from the source." Complainant

maintains that such language is patently false and misleading given that Respondent has no connection to or affiliation with Complainant.

B. Respondent

Respondent did not reply to Complainant's contentions.

6. Discussion and Findings

Under paragraph 4(a) of the Policy, to succeed Complainant must satisfy the Panel that:

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

A. Identical or Confusingly Similar

Ownership of a trademark registration is generally sufficient evidence that a complainant has the requisite rights in a mark for purposes of paragraph 4(a)(i) of the Policy. WIPO Overview of WIPO Panel Views on Selected UDRP Questions ("[WIPO Overview 3.1](#)") at section 1.2. Complainant has provided evidence that it owns trademark registrations for the SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE marks and that it has made extensive use of the marks well before Respondent registered the disputed domain name.

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 Complainant's trademark and the disputed domain name. [WIPO Overview 3.1](#), section 1.7.

Here, the SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE marks are fully incorporated and clearly visible in the disputed domain name. Although the addition of the word "members" at the tail of the disputed domain name may bear on the assessment of the second and third elements, the Panel finds the addition of such element does not prevent a finding of confusing similarity between the disputed domain name and the SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE marks for purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.1](#), section 1.8.

The Panel thus finds that 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 Respondent may demonstrate rights or legitimate interests in a disputed domain name.

Although the overall burden of proof in UDRP proceedings is on the complainant, panels have recognized that proving that a respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests in a domain name may result in the difficult 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 (although the burden of proof always remains on the complainant). If the respondent fails to come forward with such relevant evidence, the complainant is deemed to have satisfied the second element. [WIPO Overview 3.1](#), section 2.1.

Here, Complainant contends that because Complainant has longstanding rights in its SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE marks and Respondent has no relationship with or license to use these marks from Complainant, Respondent's use of the disputed domain name for a website promoting web users to join Facebook groups related to Complainant and its products is not legitimate.

While Respondent has not appeared in this matter, there is an open question as to whether Respondent's actions are a fair use given that a review of the website at the disputed domain name suggests that the website is promoting fan-club type Facebook groups. The Facebook group pages (and Respondent's website) do not appear to be of a commercial nature and mostly consist of posts by enthusiasts of Complainant's products. And while Complainant asserts that Respondent's actions are for commercial gain, Complainant has not provided any evidence tending to show that this is, in fact, the case. Thus, on its face, Respondent's actions appear to be for a noncommercial fan club.

That being said, the disputed domain name fully incorporates two of Complainant's known trademarks with the word "members" at the tail. The use of the word "members" is telling as it does not on its face conjure up a fan club, but is more likely to be seen by consumers as suggesting some form of exclusive forum or offering by or connected to Complainant. Such composition, viewed independently from the website content, undermines potential fair use as it carries a risk of implied affiliation and effectively suggests sponsorship or endorsement by Complainant. Moreover, the website at the disputed domain name on its face does not dispel that possible connection as the website contains language about receiving insider information "straight from the source". Such language further reinforces an impression of official affiliation, particularly as the website does not contain any disclaimer that clearly and prominently discloses Respondent's lack of relationship or connection to Complainant. In all, the disputed domain name and its associated website go beyond a nominative or fair use and do not constitute a legitimate use as they strongly imply an official affiliation with or authorization from Complainant and/or an official brand membership or loyalty portal operated by or for Complainant. See [WIPO Overview 3.1](#), sections 2.5.1 and 2.7.

The Panel thus finds that Complainant prevails on the second element.

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, Respondent incorporated two of Complainant's brands in the disputed domain name with the word "members," which in combination suggests that Respondent was not only well aware of Complainant and its SAZERAC and BUFFALO TRACE marks, but also sought to imply some sort of exclusive connection with or offering by Complainant. That likely being the case is confirmed by Respondent's website that is laid out to suggest, and not dispel, a connection to or authorization by Complainant. For example, the use of language such as "straight from the source" on Respondent's website implies insider or official access, which reinforces the misleading impression of affiliation. Lastly, even if Respondent's subjective intent was to build a genuine fan community, the objective effect of the disputed domain name and associated website content is to trade on Complainant's marks and associated goodwill in a manner that could mislead and divert users who believe they are interacting with an official channel of Complainant when such is not the case. Simply put, Respondent's above noted actions, which suggest an official brand membership, association with, or offering by Complainant, amount to bad faith and go beyond an acceptable fair use. See *generally* [WIPO Overview 3.1](#), section 3.1.4. In this regard, the Panel also finds it notable that Respondent has not submitted a response or provided any evidence or explanation justifying why it is not taking unfair advantage of Complainant's marks.

The Panel thus finds that Complainant prevails on the third element.

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 <sazeracbuffalotracemembers.com> be transferred to Complainant.

/Georges Nahitchevansky/

Georges Nahitchevansky

Sole Panelist

Date: July 19, 2026