



दिल्ली DELHI INDRP ARBITRATION THE NATIONAL INTERNET EXCHANGE OF INDIA [NIXI] M 063213

ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION
SOLE ARBITRATOR: RODNEY D. RYDER

Six Continents Hotels, Inc. v. The Hotel Crown
Case No. INDRP/151

ARBITRATION AWARD

Disputed Domain Name: www.crownplaza.in

The Parties

The Complainant in this arbitration proceeding is Six Continents Hotels, Inc.; a group company of the Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG), incorporated under the laws of United States of America, with office at 3, Ravinia Drive, Suite 100, Atlanta Georgia 30346, United States of America; represented by Mr Douglas M. Eisenberg [The GigaLaw Firm] and Mr Sanjay Chhabra [Archer and Angel] India.

The Respondent in this arbitration proceeding is The Hotel Crown, C/o Mr Hitesh Sanghvi, Near Choice, Swastik Char Rasta, CG Road, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, Gujarat 380009, India, [email ID - lilavati@e-identity.in], as per the details given by the Whois database maintained by the National Internet Exchange of India [NIXI].

The Domain Name and Registrar

The disputed domain name is www.crownplaza.in. The said domain name is registered with The Hotel Crown' [Mr. Hitesh Sanghvi].

Details of the disputed domain name

The dispute concerns the domain name www.crownplaza.in. The particulars of the said domain name are as follows:

Registrant Name: The Hotel Crown

Registrant Organisation: Hitesh Sanghvi

Registrant Address: Near Choice, Swastik Char Rasta, C. G. Road, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, Gujarat 380009, India

Registrant Phone: +91-7926441111

Registrant Email: lilavati@e-identity.in

Procedural History [Arbitration Proceedings]

This arbitration proceeding is in accordance with the .IN Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy [INDRP], adopted by the National Internet Exchange of India ["NIXI"]. The INDRP Rules of Procedure [the Rules] were approved by NIXI on 28th June, 2005 in accordance with the Indian Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996. By registering the disputed domain name with the NIXI accredited Registrar, the Respondent agreed to the resolution of the disputes pursuant to the IN Dispute Resolution Policy and Rules framed thereunder.

According to the information provided by the National Internet Exchange of India ["NIXI"], the history of this proceeding is as follows:

In accordance with the Rules, 2(a) and 4(a), NIXI formally notified the Respondent of the Complaint, and appointed Rodney D. Ryder as the Sole Arbitrator for adjudicating upon the dispute in accordance with the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, and the Rules framed thereunder, .IN Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy and the Rules framed thereunder. The Arbitrator submitted the Statement of Acceptance and Declaration of Impartiality and Independence, as required by the NIXI.

In this matter, the arbitration proceedings commenced on August 13, 2010. The request for submission was dispatched on August 25, 2010. A reminder was sent on September 7, 2010. The Respondent did not reply.



Grounds for the administrative proceedings

1. The disputed domain name is identical or confusingly similar to a trademark in which the Complainant has statutory/common law rights.
2. The Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the disputed domain name.
3. The disputed domain name has been registered or is/are being used in bad faith.

Parties Contentions

Complainant

The Complainant in his complaint, inter alia, contended as follows:

The Respondent's domain name is identical and confusingly similar to a name, trademark or service in which the Complainant has rights.

The Complainant, based on the 275 trademark registrations in at least 95 countries of the said trademark ['Crowne Plaza'] and based on the use of the said trademarks] in India and various other countries for many years, submitted that it is the sole proprietor of and has sole and exclusive rights to use, the said trademarks, which includes the trademark 'CROWNE PLAZA'.

The Complainant is the registered proprietor of the mark ['CROWNE PLAZA'] in India under the Trade Marks Act, 1999. The Complainant submits that as the disputed domain name is 'www.crownplaza.in', the disputed domain name is clearly identical/confusingly similar to the Complainant's trademark in which the Complainant has exclusive rights and legitimate interest.

Background of the Complainant and its statutory and common law rights Adoption:

The Complainant is one of the companies collectively known as Intercontinental Hotels Group, the world's largest hotel group by the number of rooms. Complainant's "Crowne Plaza" hotel brand was founded in 1983 and is presently used in connection with 373 hotels worldwide. The Complainant has prevailed in numerous proceedings under the policy, including the largest ever UDRP complaint filed, which resulted in a decision ordering the transfer of 1519 domain names to the complainant and its affiliated Intercontinental Hotels Group 'IHG' entity, including at least 120 domain names containing complainant's 'Crowne Plaza' Trademark [*InterContinental Hotels Corporation, Six continents Hotels, Inc. v. Daniel Kirchof* - WIPO Case No. D2009-1661].

The Complainant adopted the word 'CROWNE PLAZA' as its trading name and trademark for its services. The complainant owns a minimum of 275 registrations in at least 95 countries worldwide.

Statutory rights:

The Complainant is the owner of numerous word and figurative trademarks] "Crowne Plaza" throughout the World and in India:

1. Trademark "CROWNE PLAZA" registered with the US Patent and Trademark Office on September 18, 1984 vide Reg. no. 1297211.



2. Trademark "CROWNE PLAZA" registered with the US Patent and Trademark Office on March 14, 2000 vide Reg. no. 2329872.
3. Trademark "CROWNE PLAZA HOTELS & RESORTS" registered with the US Patent and Trademark Office on October 19, 2004 vide Reg. no. 2895328.
4. Trademark "CROWNE PLAZA" registered with the Trade Marks Registry, Government of India on March 21, 1997 vide Reg. no. 755207 in Class 16.
5. Community Trademark (CTM) "CROWNE PLAZA" registered with the Office of Harmonization in the Internal Market (OHIM) on December 17, 2002 vide Reg. no. 001017946.

Domain name registrations:

The Complainant has registered, and operates globally a number of websites using its trademark 'Crowne Plaza' in Generic and Country Code Top Level domain names such as: -

- www.crowneplaza.com
- www.crownplaza.com
- www.crownplaza.net
- www.holidayinncrowneplaza.com
- www.crowneplazanewyork.com
- www.crowneplazaarmada.com
- www.crownplazaescort.com

More than 120 domain names were transferred to the complainant, which were identical or confusingly similar to the Trademark "Crowne Plaza" [*InterContinental Hotels Corporation, Six continents Hotels, Inc. v. Daniel Kirchoff- WIPO Case No. D2009-1661*].

Respondent

The Respondent failed to reply to the notice regarding the complaint.

Discussion and Findings

The Respondent does not have any relationship with the business of the Complainant or any legitimate interest in the mark/brand ['Crown Plaza' or 'Crowne Plaza']. Moreover, the Complainant has neither given any license nor authorized the Respondent to use the Complainant's mark. The Respondent has never been commonly known by the domain name in question and, of late, registered the domain name on January 18, 2010. On May 17, 2010 the counsel for the Complainant contacted Respondent regarding the disputed domain name, informing the Respondent of the Complainant's rights in and to the Trademark "CROWNE PLAZA". The complainant, through its counsel, then demanded the Respondent to transfer the disputed domain name to Complainant by May 31, 2010. The Respondent has not responded to the Complainant's demand.

Once a complainant makes a prima facie case showing that a respondent lacks rights to the domain name at issue, the respondent must come forward with the proof that it has some legitimate interest in the domain name to rebut this presumption.



[a] The Respondent's Default

The INDRP Rules of Procedure require under Rule 8(b) that the arbitrator must ensure that each party is given a fair opportunity to present its case. Rule 8(b) reads as follows

"In all cases, the Arbitrator shall ensure that the Parties are treated with equality and that each Party is given a fair opportunity to present its case."

Rule 11(a) empowers the arbitrator to move on with an ex parte decision in case any party does not comply with the time limits or fails to reply against the complaint. Rule 11(a) reads as follows:

" In the event that a Party, in the absence of exceptional circumstances as determined by the Arbitrator in its sole discretion, does not comply with any of the time periods established by these Rules of Procedure or the Arbitrator, the Arbitrator shall proceed to decide the Complaint in accordance with law."

The Respondent was given notice of this administrative proceeding in accordance with the Rules. The .IN Registry discharged its responsibility under Rules paragraph 2(a) to employ reasonably available means calculated to achieve actual notice to the Respondent of the Complaint.

As previously indicated; the Respondent failed to file any reply to the Complaint and has not sought to answer the Complainant's assertions, evidence or contentions in any manner. The Arbitrator finds that the Respondent has been given a fair opportunity to present his case.

The 'Rules' paragraph 12(a) provides that the Arbitrator shall decide the Complaint on the basis of the statements and documents submitted in accordance with the INDRP and any law that the Arbitrator deems fit to be applicable. In accordance with Rules paragraph 12, the Arbitrator may draw such inferences as are appropriate from the Respondent's failure to reply to the Complainant's assertions and evidence or to otherwise contest the Complaint. In the circumstances, the Arbitrator's decision is based upon the Complainant's assertions and evidence and inferences drawn from the Respondent's failure to reply.

The issues involved in the dispute

The Complainant in its complaint has invoked paragraph 4 of the INDRP which reads:

*"Types of Disputes -
Any Person who considers that a registered domain name conflicts with his legitimate rights or interests may file a Complaint to the .IN Registry on the following premises:
(i) the Respondent's domain name is identical or confusingly similar to a name, trademark or service mark in which the Complainant has rights;
(ii) the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the domain name; and
(Hi) the Respondent's domain name has been registered or is being used in bad faith.*



The Respondent is required to submit to a mandatory Arbitration proceeding in the event that a Complainant files a complaint to the .IN Registry, in compliance with this Policy and Rules thereunder."

I

According to paragraph 4 of the INDRP, there are 3 essential elements of a domain name dispute which are being discussed hereunder in the light of the facts and circumstances of this case.

The Respondent's domain name is identical and confusingly similar to a name, trademark or service in which the Complainant has rights.

It has been proved by the Complainant that it has intellectual property, particularly trademark rights, and other rights in the mark "CROWNE PLAZA" by submitting substantial documents. The disputed domain name contains Complainant's "CROWNE PLAZA" Trademark in its entirety except for omitting the silent letter 'e'. Phonetically, the disputed domain name sounds identical to the Complainant's trademark and the absence of the silent letter 'e' does not alter the pronunciation of the trademark. The mark is being used by the Complainant worldwide and also in India in relation to its business. The mark has been highly publicized and advertised by the Complainant in both the electronic and print media; both in India and globally.

According to the INDRP paragraph 3 it is the responsibility of the Respondent to find out before registration that the domain name he is going to register does not violate the rights of any proprietor/brand owner.

Paragraph 3 of the INDRP is reproduced below:

"The Respondent's Representations -

By applying to register a domain name, or by asking a Registrar to maintain or renew a domain name registration, the Respondent represents and warrants that:

- the statements that the Respondent made in the Respondent's Application Form for Registration of Domain Name are complete and accurate;*
- to the Respondent's knowledge, the registration of the domain name will not infringe upon or otherwise violate the rights of any third party;*
- the Respondent is not registering the domain name for an unlawful purpose;*
and
- the Respondent will not knowingly use the domain name in violation of any applicable laws or regulations.*

It is the Respondent's responsibility to determine whether the Respondent's domain name registration infringes or violates someone else's rights."

The Respondent has failed in his responsibility discussed above and in the light of the pleadings and documents filed by the Complainant, I have come to the conclusion that the disputed domain name is identical with or deceptively similar to the Complainants' "CROWNE PLAZA" marks[s]. Accordingly, I conclude that the Complainant has satisfied the first element required by Paragraph 4 of the INDRP.

The Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the disputed domain name



The second element that the Complainant needs to prove and as is required by paragraph 4(ii) of the INDRP is that the Respondent has no legitimate right or interests in the disputed domain name.

The Complainant has never assigned, granted, licensed, sold, transferred or in any way authorised the Respondent to register or use the "CROWNE PLAZA" Trademark. Further, the Respondent has never used the disputed domain name or any trademark similar to the disputed domain name prior to the registration of the disputed domain name in its favour.

Moreover, the burden of proof on the Complainant regarding this element in the domain name lies most directly within the Respondent's knowledge. Once the Complainant makes a prima facie case showing that the Respondent does not have any rights or legitimate interest in the domain name, the evidentiary burden shifts to the Respondent to rebut the contention by providing evidence of its rights or interests in the domain name.

The Respondent has not rebutted the contentions of the Complainant and has not produced any documents or submissions to show his interest in protecting his own right and interest in the domain name. Further, the Respondent has not used the domain name or a name corresponding to the disputed domain name in connection with a bona fide offer of goods or services. Further, the Respondent is not commonly known by the disputed domain name and has not made any legitimate non-commercial or fair use of the disputed domain name, without intent for commercial gain and subsequently, misleading consumers and tarnishing the Complainant's "CROWNE PLAZA" Trademark. Thus, it is clear that the Respondent has no right or legitimate interest in respect of the disputed domain name www.crownplaza.in .

For these reasons, the Arbitrator finds that the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name.

The disputed domain name has been registered or is being used in bad faith.

It has been contended by the Complainant that the Respondent has registered and has used the disputed domain name in bad faith. The language of the INDRP paragraph 4(iii) is clear enough, and requires that either bad faith registration or bad faith use be proved.

Paragraph 6 of the INDRP provides that the following circumstances are deemed to be evidence that a Respondent has registered and used a domain name in bad faith:

"Circumstances indicating that the Respondent has registered or has acquired the domain name primarily for the purpose of selling, renting, or otherwise transferring the domain name registration to the complainant who is the owner of the trademark or service mark or to a competitor of the complainant, for valuable consideration in excess of its documented out-of-pocket costs directly related to the domain name; or

the Respondent has registered the domain name in order to prevent the owner of the trademark or service mark from reflecting the mark in a corresponding domain name, provided that the Respondent has engaged in a pattern of such conduct; or



by using the domain name, the Respondent has intentionally attempted to attract, for commercial gain, Internet users to its Website or other on-line location, by creating a likelihood of confusion with the complainant's mark as to the source, sponsorship, affiliation or endorsement of its Website or location or of a product or service on its Website or location."

From the circumstances of the case and from the evidences put before me by the Complainant, I am of the opinion that the Respondent had no previous connection with the disputed domain name and any use of the disputed domain name by the Respondent, would result in confusion and deception of the trade, consumers and public, who would assume a connection or association between the Complainant and the Respondent's website or other online locations of the Respondents or product/services on the Respondent's website and otherwise, due to the use by Respondent of the Complainant's said trademark in the disputed domain name, which trademarks have been widely used and advertised in India and all over the world by the Complainant and which trademarks are associated exclusively with the complainant, by the trade and public in India and all over the world.

The domain name is deceptively similar to the trademark of the Complainant and will lead to confusion with the Complainant's mark "CROWNE PLAZA" as to the source, sponsorship, affiliation or endorsement of the Respondent's website or location or of a product or service on the Registrant's website or location.

Thus, all the three conditions given in paragraph 6 of the Rules are proved in the circumstances of this case and thus the registration of the impugned domain name by the Respondent / Registrant is a registration in bad faith.

Decision

The Respondent failed to comply with Para 3 of the INDRP which requires that it is the responsibility of the Respondent to ensure before the registration of the impugned domain name by him that the domain name registration does not infringe or violate someone else's rights.

The Complainant has given sufficient evidence to prove trademark rights on the disputed domain name. Further, the Respondent's adoption and registration of the disputed domain name is dishonest and malafide. The Respondent had no previous connection with the disputed domain name and has clearly registered the disputed domain name in order to prevent the Complainant who is the owner of the said trademark from using and exercising proprietary rights in the said trademark in a corresponding domain name. The Respondent has not given any reason to register the domain name rightfully owned by the Complainant and therefore it can be presumed that the Respondent had registered the domain name only to make monetary benefit by selling the domain name to the rightful owner or his competitor.

[Relevant decisions: Uniroyal Engineered Products, Inc. v. Nauga Network Services WIPO D2000-0503; Thaigem Global Marketing Limited v. Sanchai Aree WIPO D2002-0358; Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano v. La casa del Latte di Bibulic Adriano WIPO D2003-0661; Kenneth Cole Productions, Inc v. Vishwas Infomedia INDRP/093; Microsoft Corporation v. Chun Man Kam INDRP/119]

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Singh', with a horizontal line underneath it.

While the overall burden of proof rests with the Complainant, panels have recognized that this could result in the often impossible task of proving a negative, requiring information that is often primarily within the knowledge of the Respondent. Therefore a complainant is required to make out a *prima facie* case that the Respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests. Once such *prima facie* case is made, Respondent carries the burden of demonstrating rights or legitimate interests in the domain name. Thus it is clear that the Respondent is using the disputed domain name in bad faith and has registered the domain name in order to prevent the owner of the trademark or service mark from reflecting the mark in a corresponding domain name.

[*Relevant decisions: Croatia Airlines d.d. v. Modern Empire Internet Ltd. WIPO D2003-0455; Belupo d.d. v. WACHEM d.o.o. WIPO D2004-0110*]

The Respondent's registration and use of the Domain Name is abusive and in bad faith. The Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the domain name. In accordance with Policy and Rules, the arbitrator directs that the disputed domain name be transferred from the Respondent to the Complainant; with a request to NIXI to monitor the transfer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. D. Ryder', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is positioned above the printed name and title of the arbitrator.

Rodney D. Ryder
Sole Arbitrator

Date: September 13, 2010