

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BEFORE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION**

COMMISSIONERS: **Deborah Platt Majoras, Chairman**
 Pamela Jones Harbour
 Jon Leibowitz
 William E. Kovacic
 J. Thomas Rosch

In the Matter of

REALCOMP II LTD.,

a corporation.

Docket No. 9320

COMPLAINT

Pursuant to the provisions of the Federal Trade Commission Act (15 U.S.C. § 41, et seq.) and by virtue of the authority vested in it by said Act, the Federal Trade Commission, having reason to believe that Realcomp II Ltd. (hereinafter sometimes referred to as “Respondent” or “Realcomp”), a corporation, has violated and is now violating the provisions of said Act, and it appearing to the Commission that a proceeding by it in respect thereof would be in the public interest, hereby issues this complaint stating its charges as follows:

NATURE OF THE CASE

This matter concerns a corporation, owned by a group of shareholder Boards of Realtors in Southeastern Michigan, that operates a Multiple Listing Service, which is designed to foster real estate brokerage services by sharing and publicizing information on properties for sale by customers of real estate brokers. Realcomp has adopted policies that limit the publication and marketing of certain properties, based on the terms of the listing contract entered into between a real estate broker and the customer who wishes to sell a property. The policies limit the publication of information about such properties on popular internet real estate web sites, and make it more difficult for brokers to search for such listings on the Realcomp MLS. These policies discriminate against certain kinds of lawful contracts between listing real estate brokers and their customers, and lack any pro-competitive justification. These rules constitute an anticompetitive concerted refusal to deal except on specified terms with respect to key inputs for the provision of residential real estate brokerage services, and violate the antitrust laws.

RESPONDENT AND ITS MEMBERS

PARAGRAPH 1. Respondent Realcomp II Ltd. is a corporation organized, existing and doing business under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Michigan, with its office and principal place of business at 28555 Orchard Lake Road, Suite 200, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48334. Respondent is owned by several realtor boards and associations. The members of Respondent are real estate brokers doing business in Southeastern Michigan.

PARAGRAPH 2. Respondent is organized for the purpose of serving its members' interests, including their economic interests, by promoting, fostering, and advancing the real estate brokerage services industry in Southeastern Michigan. One of the primary functions of Respondent is the operation of the Realcomp Multiple Listing Service. A multiple listing service ("MLS") is a clearinghouse through which member real estate brokerage firms regularly and systematically exchange information on listings of real estate properties and share commissions with members who locate purchasers. When a property is listed on the Realcomp MLS, it is made available to all members of the MLS for the purpose of trying to match a buyer with a seller. Information about the property, including the asking price, add.54ono como9.03 0 Td9 es aati

PARAGRAPH 3. The Realcomp shareholder Boards are affiliated with the National Association of Realtors ("NAR"), thereby requiring Realcomp to abide by the NAR rules. Realcomp has more than 14,500 real estate prds as members. All of the Realcomp members hold either Td active real estate license or Td active appraiser license Td9are active in the real estate profession.

PARAGRAPH 4. The large majo

- (B) Affect the transmission of real estate listing information to public real estate web sites that are intended for a national audience, including Realtor.com.

THE CHALLENGED CONDUCT

PARAGRAPH 7. Respondent has restrained competition in the provision of residential real estate brokerage services by combining or conspiring with its members or others, or by acting as a combination of its members or others, to hinder unreasonably the ability of real estate brokers in Southeastern Michigan to offer residential real estate brokerage services on terms other than those contained in the traditional form of listing agreement known as an Exclusive Right to Sell Listing.

PARAGRAPH 8. An Exclusive Right to Sell Listing is a listing agreement under which the property owner or principal appoints a real estate broker as his or her exclusive agent for a designated period of time, to sell the property on the owner's stated terms, and agrees to pay the broker a commission when the property is sold, whether by the listing broker, the owner or another broker. An Exclusive Right to Sell Listing is the form of listing agreement traditionally used by listing brokers to provide full-service residential real estate brokerage services.

PARAGRAPH 9. An alternative form of listing agreement to an Exclusive Right to Sell Listing is an Exclusive Agency Listing. An Exclusive Agency Listing is a listing agreement under which the listing broker acts as an exclusive agent of the property owner or principal in the sale of a property, but reserves to the property owner or principal a right to sell the property without further assistance of the listing broker, in which case the listing broker is paid a reduced or no commission when the property is sold.

PARAGRAPH 10. Exclusive Agency Listings are a means by which listing brokers can offer lower-cost, Unbundled Real Estate Services to consumers. Unbundled Real Estate Brokerage Services are lawful arrangements pursuant to which a listing broker will cause the property offered for sale to be listed on the MLS, but the listing broker will not provide some or all of the additional services offered by traditional real estate brokers, or will only offer such additional services as may be chosen from a menu of services for a fee.

PARAGRAPH 11. Brokers offering Unbundled Real Estate Brokerage Services often provide home sellers with exposure of their listing through the MLS for a flat fee or reduced commission that is small compared to the full commission prices commonly charged by traditional brokers, often by entering into Exclusive Agency Listings that reserve to the home seller the right to sell the property without owing more to the listing broker.

PARAGRAPH 12. To be listed in the MLS, a home seller must enter into a listing agreement with a listing real estate broker that is a member of the MLS. The compensation paid by the home seller to the listing broker is determined by negotiation between the home seller and the listing broker. Whatever type of listing agreement is entered into between the home seller and the listing real estate broker, the MLS rules require that the home seller must offer to pay a

commission to a cooperating real estate broker, known as a selling broker, who successfully secures a buyer for the property. If the home seller fails to pay a commission to a selling broker who secures a buyer for the property, the selling broker may recover the commission due from the listing agent, under rules and procedures established by the MLS.

PARAGRAPH 13. In 2001, Realcomp adopted and approved a rule that stated: “Listing information downloaded and/or otherwise displayed pursuant to IDX shall be limited to properties listed on an exclusive right to sell basis” (the “Web Site Policy”).

PARAGRAPH 14. The Web Site Policy prevents information concerning certain lawful residential property listings provided to Realcomp, including “Exclusive Agency Listings,” from being transmitted to real estate web sites, based on the contractual relationship between the home seller and the real estate agent the seller employs to promote the property.

PARAGRAPH 15. The Web Site Policy specifically prevents information concerning Exclusive Agency Listings from being published on web sites otherwise approved by Realcomp to receive information concerning Realcomp MLS listings (collectively, “Approved Web Sites”). Such web sites include (1) the NAR-operated “Realtor.com” web site; (2) the Realcomp-owned “Moveinmichigan.com” web site; and (3) Realcomp-member web sites.

PARAGRAPH 16. In or about the fall of 2003, Respondent changed the Realcomp MLS search screen to default to Exclusive Right to Sell Listings (“Search Function Policy”). In order to view any other listing types, including Exclusive Agency Listings, Realcomp members have to select the additional listing types in the search screen.

REALCOMP HAS MARKET POWER

PARAGRAPH 17. The provision of residential real estate brokerage services to sellers and buyers of real property in the Southeastern Michigan and/or the Realcomp Service Area is a relevant market.

PARAGRAPH 18. The publication and sharing of information relating to residential real estate listings for the purpose of brokering residential real estate transactions is a key input to the provision of real estate brokerage services, and represents a relevant input market. Publication of listings through the Realcomp MLS is generally considered by sellers, buyers and their brokers to be the fastest and most effective means of obtaining the broadest market exposure for property in the Realcomp Service Area.

PARAGRAPH 19. Participation in Realcomp is a service that is necessary for the provision of effective residential real estate brokerage services to sellers and buyers of real property in the Realcomp Service Area. Participation significantly increases the opportunities of brokerage firms to enter into listing agreements with residential property owners, and significantly reduces the costs of obtaining up-to-date and comprehensive information on listings and sales. The realization of these opportunities and efficiencies is important for brokers to

compete effectively in the provision of residential real estate brokerage services in the Realcomp Service Area.

PARAGRAPH 20.

are necessary for the provision of effective residential real estate brokerage services. As such, the acts and practices are inherently suspect restraints of trade that have no cognizable and plausible efficiency justifications.

PARAGRAPH 27. The purposes, capacities, tendencies, or effects of the policies, acts, or practices of Realcomp and its members as described herein have been and are unreasonably to restrain competition among brokers, and to injure consumers, in the market for provision of residential real estate brokerage services within Southeastern Michigan and/or the Realcomp Service Area.

PARAGRAPH 28. The policies, acts, practices, and combinations or conspiracies described herein constitute unfair methods of competition in or affecting interstate commerce in escrday2.3Januovision oTd(have, 2007ract)Tj2.1/P ofox [28P10:00a.m.o

Administrative Law Judge, without further notice to you, to find the facts to be as alleged in the complaint and to enter an initial decision containing such findings, appropriate conclusions, and order.

The ALJ will schedule an initial prehearing scheduling conference to be held not later than 14 days after the last answer is filed by any party named as a Respondent in the complaint. Unless otherwise directed by the ALJ, the sche

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- C. “Multiple Listing Service” or “MLS” means a cooperative venture by which real estate brokers serving a common market area submit their listings to a central service which, in turn, distributes the information for the purpose of fostering ~~cooperation and offering~~ compensation in and facilitating real estate transactions.
- D. “Realcomp MLS” means the Realcomp MLS or any other MLS owned, operated or controlled, in whole or in part, directly or indirectly by Realcomp, any of its Owners, predecessors, divisions and wholly or partially owned subsidiaries, affiliates, and all the directors, officers, employees, agents, and representatives of the foregoing.
- E. “Realcomp Member” means any person authorized by Realcomp to use or enjoy ~~the benefits of the Realcomp MLS~~, including but not limited to Members and Subscribers as those terms are defined in the Realcomp Rules and Regulations.
- F. “IDX” means the internet data exchange process that provides a means or ~~mechanism for MLS listings~~ to be integrated within a Website.
- G. “IDX Website” means a Website that is capable of integrating the IDX listing information within the Website.
- H. “Moveinmichigan.com” means the Website owned and operated by Realcomp that allows the general public to search information concerning real estate listings from Realcomp.
- I. “Realtor.com” means the Website operated by the National Association of Realtors that allows the general public to search information concerning real estate listings downloaded Tc 0n8.38 0 Tdic to sows the genc4ts lcomp2NationalTj

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on an unlimited or restrictive basis, or any other definition that Realcomp ascribes to the term “Exclusive Agency Listing.”

- M. “Services of the MLS” means the benefits and services provided by the MLS to assist Realcomp Members in selling, leasing and valuing property and/or brokering real estate transactions. With respect to real estate brokers or agents representing home sellers, Services of the MLS shall include, but are not limited to:
1. having the property included among the listings in the MLS in a manner so that information concerning the listing is easily accessible by cooperating brokers; and
 2. having the property publicized through means available to the MLS, including, but not limited to, information concerning the listing being made available on Moveinmichigan.com, Realtor.com and IDX Websites.

II.

IT IS ORDERED that Respondent Realcomp, its successors and assigns, and its Board of Directors, officers, committees, agents, representatives, and employees, directly or indirectly, or through any corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, in connection with the operation of a Multiple Listing Service or Approved Websites in or affecting commerce, as “commerce” is defined in Section 4 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. § 44, shall forthwith cease and desist from adopting or enforcing any policy, rule, practice or agreement of Realcomp to deny, restrict or interfere with the ability of Realcomp Members to enter into Exclusive Agency Listings or other lawful listing agreements with the sellers of properties, including but not limited to any policy, rule, practice or agreement to:

1. prevent Realcomp Members from offering or accepting Exclusive Agency Listings;
2. prevent Realcomp Members from cooperating with listing brokers or agents that offer or accept Exclusive Agency Listings;
3. prevent Realcomp Members, or the sellers of properties who have entered into lawful listing agreements with Realcomp Members, from publishing information concerning listings offered pursuant to Exclusive Agency Listings on the Realcomp MLS and Approved Websites;
4. deny or restrict the Services of the MLS to Exclusive Agency Listings or other lawful listings in any way, and

5. treat Exclusive Agency Listings, or any other lawful listings, in a less advantageous manner than Exclusive Right to Sell Listings, including but not limited to, any policy, rule or practice pertaining to the searching, sorting, ordering, transmission, downloading, or displaying of information pertaining to such listings.

Provided, however, that nothing herein shall prohibit the Respondent from adopting or enforcing any policy, rule, practice or agreement regarding subscription or participation requirements, payment of dues, administrative matters, or any other policy, rule, practice or agreement, that it can show is reasonably ancillary to the legitimate and beneficial objectives of the MLS.

III.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent shall, no later than thirty (30) days after the date this Order becomes final, amend its rules and regulations to conform to the provisions of this Order.

IV.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, within ninety (90) days after the date this Order becomes final, Respondent shall (1) inform each Realcomp Member of the amendments to its rules and regulations to conform to the provisions of this Order; and (2) provide each Realcomp Member with a copy of this Order. Respondent shall transmit the rule change and Order by the means it uses to communicate with its members in the ordinary course of Realcomp's business, which shall include, but not be limited to: (A) sending one or more emails with one or more statements that there has been a change to the rule and an Order, along with a link to the amended rule and the Order, to each Realcomp Member whose email address is known to Realcomp; (B) mail to any Realcomp Member whose email address is unknown one or more statements that there has been a change to the rule and an Order, along with a link to the amended rule and the Order; and (C) placing on the publicly accessible Realcomp Website (www.Realcomp.com) a statement that there has been a change to the rule and an Order, along with a link to the amended rule and the Order. Respondent shall modify its Website as described above no later than five (5) business days after the date the Order becomes final, and shall display such modifications for no less than ninety (90) days from the date this Order becomes final. The Order shall remain accessible through common search terms and archives on the Website for five (5) years from the date it becomes final.

V.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent shall notify the Commission at least thirty (30) days prior to any proposed change in Respondent, such as dissolution, assignment or sale resulting in the emergence of a successor corporation or any other proposed changes in the corporation which may affect compliance obligations arising out of the Order.

VI.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent shall file a written report within six (6) months of the date this Order becomes final, and annually on the anniversary date of the original report for each of the five (5) years thereafter, and at such other times as the Commission may require by written notice to Respondent, setting forth in detail the manner and form in which it has complied with this Order.

VII.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Order shall terminate ten (10) years from the date the Order is issued.

WHEREFORE, THE PREMISES CONSIDERED, the Federal Trade Commission on this tenth day of October, 2006, issues its Complaint against Respondent Realcomp II Ltd.

By the Commission.

Donald S. Clark
Secretary