

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

MULTIPLE LISTING SERVICE, INC.,

a corporation.

Docket No. C-

DECISION AND ORDER

The Federal Trade Commission (“Commission”) having initiated an investigation of certain acts and practices of the Multiple Listing Service, Inc., hereinafter sometimes referred to as “Respondent” or “MLS, Inc.,” and Respondent having been furnished thereafter with a copy of the draft Complaint that the Bureau of Competition presented to the Commission for its consideration and which, if issued by the Commission, would charge Respondent with violations of Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, as amended, 15 U.S.C. § 45; and

Respondent, its attorneys, and counsel for the Commission having thereafter executed an Agreement Containing Consent Order (“Consent Agreement”), containing an admission by Respondent of all the jurisdictional facts set forth in the aforesaid draft Complaint, a statement that the signing of the Consent Agreement is for settlement purposes only and does not constitute an admission by Respondent that the law has been violated as alleged in such Complaint, or that the facts as alleged in such Complaint, other than jurisdictional facts, are true, and waivers and other provisions of the Consent Agreement, are hereby approved by the Commission, and

1. Respondent Multiple Listing Service, Inc. is a corporation organized, existing and doing business under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Wisconsin, with its office and principal place of business at 11430 West North Avenue, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin 53226.

2. The Federal Trade Commission has jurisdiction of the subject matter of this proceeding and of the Respondent, and the proceeding is in the public interest.

ORDER

I.

IT IS ORDERED that for the purposes of this Order, the following definitions shall apply:

- A. “Respondent” or “MLS, Inc.” means Multiple Listing Service, Inc., the MLS, Inc. Board of Directors, the predecessors, successors and assigns of MLS, Inc., its divisions and wholly- or partially-owned subsidiaries, affiliates, licensees of affiliates, partnerships, and joint ventures; and all the directors, officers, committees, employees, consultants, agents, and representatives of the foregoing, when acting in such capacity. The terms “subsidiary,” “affiliate” and “joint venture” refer to any person in which there is partial or total ownership or control by MLS, Inc., and is specifically meant to include Metro MLS and/or each of the MLS, Inc. Websites.
- B. “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 in and facilitating real estate transactions.
- C. The term “Metro MLS” means any MLS owned, operated or controlled, in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, by MLS, Inc.
- D. “Participant” means any person authorized by MLS, Inc. to access, use or enjoy the benefits of the Metro MLS in accordance with MLS, Inc.’s bylaws, policies, rules and regulations.
- E. “IDX” means the internet data exchange process that provides a means or mechanism for MLS listings to be integrated within a Website, including but not limited to IDX and/or Broker Reciprocity as defined by MLS, Inc.
- F. “IDX Website” means a Website that is capable of integrating the IDX listing information within the Website.
- G. “MLS, Inc. Websites” means any public Website operated by MLS, Inc., including but not limited to wihomes.com.

- H. “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 from a variety of MLSs representing different geographic areas of the country, including but not limited to real estate listings from MLS, Inc.

- I. “Approved Website” means a Website to which MLS, Inc. or Metro MLS provides information concerning listings for publication, including but not limited to Participant IDX Websites, MLS, Inc. Websites, and Realtor.com.

II.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent 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 MLS, Inc. to deny, restrict or interfere with the ability of Participants 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 Participants from offering or accepting Exclusive Agency Listings;
2. prevent Participants from cooperating with listing brokers or agents that offer or accept Exclusive Agency Listings;
3. prevent Participants from publishing information concerning listings offered pursuant to Exclusive Agency Listings on Approved Websites;
4. deny or restrict the Services of the MLS to Exclusive Agency Listings or Other Lawful Listings in any way that such Services of the MLS are not denied or restricted to Exclusive Right to Sell Listings; 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 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 that it can show is reasonably ancillary to the legitimate and beneficial objectives of the MLS. Such policies, rules, practices or agreements may include those regarding subscription or participation requirements, payment of dues, and administrative matters, and may also include, but are not limited to, rules allowing a Participant to make an independent decision regarding the selection of IDX listing information to be transmitted to the Participant or the display of listing information on that Participant’s IDX Web Site, so long as Respondent can show that the policy, rule, practice or agreement is reasonably ancillary to the legitimate and beneficial objectives of the MLS.

III.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, no later than thirty (30) days after the date this Order becomes final, Respondent shall have amended 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) have informed each Participant of the amendments to its rules and regulations to conform to the provisions of this Order; and (2) provide each Participant 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 MLS, Inc.'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 Participant; and (B) placing on the publicly accessible MLS, Inc. Website (www.metromls.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:

- A. any proposed dissolution of such Respondent;
- B. any acquisition, merger or consolidation of Respondent; or
- C. any other change in the Respondent, including, but not limited to, assignment and the creation or dissolution of subsidiaries, if such change might 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.

By the Commission.

Donald S. Clark
Secretary

SEAL
ISSUED: