



Ratio WebServices  
a Division of Ratio Corp.

Fort Lauderdale, Monday, July 30, 2001

Ratio Corp.  
Daniel F. Reimann  
1126-313 S. Federal Hwy.  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316-1257  
530-688-8428 (v)  
530-688-8428 (f)

Attorney General  
John Ashcroft  
United States Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington DC, 20530-0001

RE: Complaint against Microsoft's Unfair and Anti-competitive Smart Tags

Dear Mr. Ashcroft:

I am writing today to complain about Microsoft Smart Tags.

Microsoft Smart Tags are a new feature implemented in Microsoft software whereby Microsoft has hyperlinked, WITHOUT THE PERMISSION OF A WEB SITE OWNER, a particular word or phrase on web pages which, when the web visitor clicks on those hyperlinks, direct the web visitor to a Microsoft owned web site or to a web site which pays Microsoft for this service.

You can see an example of how Microsoft hurts e-tailers, web site owners, and web site operators here:

<http://www.smart-tags.org>

According to CNET:

"Smart Tags, which are created using XML (Extensible Markup Language), ... have strengthened Microsoft's ability to tie its newest applications and operating systems to its own Web sites or others that it favors, including those that charge fees."

I don't know if you have heard about Microsoft Smart Tags or not, but beginning today, I noticed that these Smart Tags started appearing as hyperlinks on various web sites on the Internet due to the Microsoft software that I recently installed on my computer.

Now, for me NOT to click on the Microsoft Smart Tags is not so much of an issue, but what DOES disturb me is that these Microsoft Smart Tags lead web visitors off web sites which I do own and onto Microsoft sites as mentioned above. This means that I could potentially lose web visitors and more importantly, WEB SALES on my web sites!

As a result of Microsoft's Smart Tag implementation, Ratio Corp. must now modify EVERY web document served on all of its web servers in order to disable Microsoft Smart Tags. Ratio Corp must do this because 90% of the world's computers use Microsoft software and over 60% of Internet-connected users browse with Microsoft Internet Explorer.

As Microsoft Office XP and Microsoft Windows XP roll out Microsoft's door, other e-tailers, web site owners, web site operators, or anyone developing on the web for that matter, will now have to expend this same amount of effort, money, and time to ensure that their own web site visitors are not led away by Microsoft Smart Tags.

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Voice: (530) 688-8428  
Fax: (530) 688-8428

eMail: [service@ratio.net](mailto:service@ratio.net)  
[www.ratio.net](http://www.ratio.net)

President: D.F. Reimann  
Lic.# P1987002512 (FL)



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Let me tell you that I work hard to get every web site visitor and I want to keep them on my web sites as long as possible. I also want them to buy from my web sites. Why should Microsoft be allowed to subvert the purposes of my web sites?

I could POSSIBLY accept Microsoft Smart Tags if they were to open a new browsing window in the web browser, but, by default, they do not.

If Microsoft retorts that a web visitor CAN set his or her web browser to have a new window opened upon clicking on a Microsoft Smart Tag and, therefore, a web site would not lose the web visitor, then I would have to argue that most users are basic users and they WOULD NOT DO THIS.

If Microsoft retorts that a web visitor CAN disable Smart Tags in his or her web browser, thereby disabling Microsoft Smart Tags, then I would argue with my response from above: most users are basic users and they WOULD NOT DO THIS.

Microsoft has chosen to allow a web visitor to be taken directly off one web site and led onto whichever web site Microsoft chooses in order for Microsoft to make more money without any consideration for the rest of us.

Every e-tailer, web site owner, and web site operator struggles every day to get the web sales and web visitors that they do get, and this new feature is hurtful to all of them. Microsoft has not asked for MY permission to implement Microsoft Smart Tags and I am sure that other e-tailers, web site owners, and web site operators won't like Microsoft Smart Tags either.

E-tailers, web site owners, and web site operators should decide which hyperlinks appear in a web site document and MICROSOFT SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO DO THIS!

MICROSOFT SMART TAGS ARE UNFAIR AND ANTI-COMPETITIVE!

Best Regards,  
Ratio Corp.,  
Daniel F. Reimann  
President  
dreimann@ratio.net  
<http://www.ratio.net>  
530-688-8428 (voice)  
530-688-8428 (fax)

PS: Microsoft Smart Tags invade (web/consumer) user privacy as well. Microsoft Smart Tags connect to Microsoft servers, and thereby track every movement of a (web/consumer) user on the Internet. I have narrowly crafted this letter to address only how Microsoft Smart Tags are anti-competitive and unfair to web site owners, web site operators, and web developers. Hopefully others will be able to take up the cause against Microsoft violating user privacy.

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