

# Appendix

Panel Opinion of the U.S. Court of Appeals  
for the Eighth Circuit (Feb. 2, 2024)

United States Court of Appeals  
For the Eighth Circuit

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No. 22-3355

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Ronald Ragan, Jr.

*Plaintiff - Appellant*

v.

Berkshire Hathaway Automotive, Inc.

*Defendant - Appellee*

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Appeal from United States District Court  
for the Western District of Missouri

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Submitted: December 13, 2023

Filed: February 2, 2024

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Before SMITH, Chief Judge, GRUENDER and GRASZ, Circuit Judges.

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GRASZ, Circuit Judge.

Ronald Ragan claims Berkshire Hathaway Automotive Inc. (BHA) copied his single-page car dealership customer intake form (“Guest Sheet”) without his permission. Under federal copyright law, this case boils down to whether the Guest Sheet exhibits a sufficient degree of creativity. It does not, and for that reason, we affirm.

## I. Background

Ragan claims he created a document called the Guest Sheet that purportedly helps car dealerships sell cars. The Guest Sheet consists of questions, prompts, headings, fill-in-the-blank lines, and checkboxes. In 1999, the United States Copyright Office issued a certificate of registration to Ragan for the Guest Sheet.

Around 2000, Ragan claims the Van Tuyl Group, Inc., a privately-owned auto dealership, copied and used the Guest Sheet. Ragan notified Van Tuyl of the supposed infringement. In return, Van Tuyl's insurer, American International Group, Inc., sued Ragan, seeking a declaratory judgment that Van Tuyl was not infringing on Ragan's copyright and the copyright was void and unenforceable. That lawsuit was later dismissed for lack of personal jurisdiction.

In 2015, BHA acquired Van Tuyl. Ragan claims that after acquiring Van Tuyl, BHA continued to use the Guest Sheet. After Ragan complained, BHA allegedly agreed to modify the form but continued using it. Ragan then commenced this lawsuit, claiming copyright infringement. BHA moved for judgment on the pleadings, asserting the Guest Sheet was not copyrightable. The district court<sup>1</sup> granted BHA's motion and entered judgment against Ragan. This appeal followed.

## II. Analysis

On appeal, Ragan argues the district court erred by finding the Guest Sheet uncopyrightable. We review a grant of judgment on the pleadings de novo, "viewing all facts pleaded by the nonmoving party as true and granting all reasonable inferences in favor of that party." *Henson v. Union Pac. R.R. Co.*, 3 F.4th 1075, 1080 (8th Cir. 2021) (quoting *Clemons v. Crawford*, 585 F.3d 1119, 1124 (8th Cir.

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<sup>1</sup>The Honorable Howard F. Sachs, United States District Judge for the Western District of Missouri.

2009)). Where no dispute about the facts exists, we will address copyrightability as a question of law. *See Toro Co. v. R & R Prods. Co.*, 787 F.2d 1208, 1213 (8th Cir. 1986).

Ragan contends he owns the copyright to the Guest Sheet. The Copyright Act extends copyright protection only to “original works of authorship.” 17 U.S.C. § 102(a). This originality requirement is imposed by the Constitution, as well as the text of the Copyright Act itself. *See Feist Publ’ns., Inc. v. Rural Tel. Serv. Co.*, 499 U.S. 340, 346 (1991) (“Originality is a constitutional requirement.”). To meet this requirement, a work must be “independently created by the author (as opposed to copied from other works), and . . . possess[] at least some minimal degree of creativity.” *Id.* at 345.

Although Ragan claims the Guest Sheet is an “elegant” form “distilled [from] years of . . . experience,” it noticeably lacks the requisite originality of a copyrightable work. It is a basic customer intake sheet containing fewer than 100 words seeking basic information:

**GUEST SHEET**

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
JUN 03 1999  
COPYRIGHT OFFICE

GUEST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY / STATE / ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: RESIDENCE \_\_\_\_\_ WORK \_\_\_\_\_

SALESMAN \_\_\_\_\_

**How Did You Hear About Us?**

<input type="checkbox"/> TV <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Station Listened To _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Referral <input type="checkbox"/> Be Back	<input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> Previous Customer <input type="checkbox"/> Walk In <input type="checkbox"/> Location
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**Vehicle Considered**

New                       Used  
 Car                         Truck  
 Stock# \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_  
 Make \_\_\_\_\_  
 Basic Requirements Needed on this Vehicle?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Trade Info**

Year \_\_\_\_\_ Make \_\_\_\_\_  
 Miles \_\_\_\_\_  
 Payoff \_\_\_\_\_ Lender \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current Payment \_\_\_\_\_  
 Payment's Left \_\_\_\_\_  
 Why are you considering transportation at this time?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Drive Home Today Budget**

Desired Monthly Payment \_\_\_\_\_ up to \_\_\_\_\_

Desired Cash Down \_\_\_\_\_ up to \_\_\_\_\_

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Ragan claims the selection and arrangement of the words used as section headings and question prompts make the Guest Sheet sufficiently original. But the “mere selection” of words does not make a work copyrightable. *Feist*, 499 U.S. at 362–63 (explaining the act of selecting which words to include in a utilitarian work is not enough to meet the originality requirement). The Guest Sheet still must exhibit some degree of creativity, which it fails to do, mainly because it does not convey information. *See Kregos v. Associated Press*, 937 F.2d 700, 708 (2d Cir. 1991) (“[A] form that conveys no information and serves only to provide blank space for recording information contains no expression or selection of information that could possibly warrant copyright protection.”). *See also Utopia Provider Sys., Inc. v. Pro-*

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