

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
SHERMAN DIVISION

THE STATE OF TEXAS, ET AL. §
 §
v. § CIVIL NO. 4:20-CV-957-SDJ
 §
GOOGLE LLC §

MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER

Before the Court is Defendant Google LLC’s Motion to Transfer Venue Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1404(a), (Dkt. #28). For the following reasons, the Court concludes that the motion should be **DENIED**.

I. BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs—the States of Texas, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah, and the Commonwealths of Kentucky and Puerto Rico, by and through their Attorneys General (collectively, “Plaintiff States”)—have brought the instant action in the Eastern District of Texas against Defendant Google LLC (“Google”).¹ Plaintiff States, invoking their statutory, equitable, or common-law powers, and pursuant to Sections 4 and 16 of the Clayton Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 15c, 26, brought this action in their respective sovereign capacities and as *parens patriae* on behalf of the citizens, general welfare, and economies of their respective states.

¹ The Court has jurisdiction over the instant action. Plaintiff States assert claims under Sections 1 and 2 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 1, 2, and Sections 4 and 16 of the Clayton Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 15c, 26. *See also* 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331, 1337. Plaintiff States also assert various state-law claims arising out of the same nucleus of operative fact, over which this Court is empowered to exercise supplemental jurisdiction. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).

At its core, Plaintiff States' theory of the case is that Google has violated Section 2 of the Sherman Act, as well as applicable state antitrust laws, by unlawfully maintaining a monopoly, or attempting to acquire a monopoly, in markets associated with online display advertising. Specifically, Plaintiff States allege that Google engaged in anticompetitive conduct to force publishers and advertisers to use its online-display-advertising products or services. Plaintiff States further allege that Google violated Section 1 of the Sherman Act through an unlawful agreement with Facebook. Plaintiff States also contend that Google's representations to publishers, advertisers, and consumers violated state consumer-protection and deceptive-trade laws. Based on these allegations, Plaintiff States assert the following causes of action: actual and attempted monopolization and unlawful tying under Section 2 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. § 2; unlawful agreement under Section 1 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1; and thirty additional state-law claims under Plaintiff States' respective antitrust and deceptive-trade-practices statutes.

Google denies all the substantive factual and legal allegations in Plaintiff States' Amended Complaint. Google asserts that it has not acted anticompetitively in the digital-advertising and e-commerce marketplace. Google specifically maintains that Plaintiff States' Amended Complaint is factually inaccurate, that the digital-advertising and e-commerce marketplace is highly competitive, and that Plaintiff States' legal theory turns on the incorrect premise that antitrust law requires companies to design their products so as to help their rivals become stronger competitors. Google further contends that Plaintiff States mischaracterize the terms

and misunderstand the impact of a procompetitive agreement between Google and Facebook and that Google has not made false or deceptive statements to consumers concerning its products or services.

Google has filed a motion to transfer venue under 28 U.S.C. § 1404(a), arguing that this case should be transferred to the United States District Court for the Northern District of California. (Dkt. #28). Google does not dispute that venue is proper in the Eastern District of Texas under 15 U.S.C. § 22 and 28 U.S.C. § 1391. Google contends that transfer is appropriate because the Northern District of California constitutes a clearly more convenient forum for this action. Plaintiff States counter that Google's transfer motion should be denied because Google has failed to show that the private-interest and public-interest factors comprising the Section 1404(a) test, taken together, warrant the transfer of this case to the Northern District of California.

II. LEGAL STANDARD

Section 1404(a) permits the transfer of civil actions for the convenience of the parties and witnesses and in the interest of justice to other districts or divisions where the plaintiffs could have properly brought the action. 28 U.S.C. § 1404(a). District courts have broad discretion in deciding whether to transfer a case under Section 1404(a), *In re Volkswagen of Am., Inc.*, 545 F.3d 304, 311 (5th Cir. 2008) (en banc), and Section 1404(a) motions are adjudicated on an "individualized, case-by-case consideration of convenience and fairness." *TravelPass Grp. v. Caesars Ent. Corp.*, No. 5:18-cv-153, 2019 WL 3806056, at *11 (E.D. Tex. May 9, 2019)

(quoting *Stewart Org., Inc. v. Ricoh Corp.*, 487 U.S. 22, 29, 108 S.Ct. 2239, 101 L.Ed.2d 22 (1988) and *Van Dusen v. Barrack*, 376 U.S. 612, 622, 84 S.Ct. 805, 11 L.Ed.2d 945 (1964)), *report and recommendation adopted*, 2019 WL 4071784 (E.D. Tex. Aug. 29, 2019).

The party seeking a transfer under Section 1404(a) must show good cause. *Volkswagen*, 545 F.3d at 315 (quoting *Humble Oil & Refin. Co. v. Bell Marine Serv., Inc.*, 321 F.2d 53, 56 (5th Cir. 1963)). In this context, showing good cause requires the moving party to “clearly demonstrate that a transfer is for the convenience of parties and witnesses [and] in the interest of justice.” *Id.* (cleaned up) (quoting 28 U.S.C. § 1404(a)). When the movant fails to demonstrate that the proposed transferee venue is “clearly more convenient” than the plaintiff’s chosen venue, “the plaintiff’s choice should be respected.” *Id.* Conversely, when the movant demonstrates that the proposed transferee venue is clearly more convenient, the movant has shown good cause and the court should transfer the case. *Id.* The “clearly more convenient” standard is not equal to a clear-and-convincing-evidence standard, but it is nevertheless “materially more than a mere preponderance of convenience.” *Quest NetTech Corp. v. Apple, Inc.*, No. 2:19-CV-00118, 2019 WL 6344267, at *7 (E.D. Tex. Nov. 27, 2019).

To determine whether a Section 1404(a) movant has demonstrated that the proposed transferee venue is “clearly more convenient,” the Fifth Circuit employs the four private-interest and four public-interest factors first enunciated in *Gulf Oil Corp. v. Gilbert*, 330 U.S. 501, 67 S.Ct. 839, 91 L.Ed. 1055 (1947). *Volkswagen*,

545 F.3d at 315. The private-interest factors are: “(1) the relative ease of access to sources of proof; (2) the availability of compulsory process to secure the attendance of witnesses; (3) the cost of attendance for willing witnesses; and (4) all other practical problems that make trial of a case easy, expeditious and inexpensive.” *Id.* (citation omitted). The public-interest factors are: “(1) the administrative difficulties flowing from court congestion; (2) the local interest in having localized interests decided at home; (3) the familiarity of the forum with the law that will govern the case; and (4) the avoidance of unnecessary problems of conflict of laws [or in] the application of foreign law.” *Id.* (alteration in original) (citation omitted).

Although these factors “are appropriate for most transfer cases, they are not necessarily exhaustive or exclusive,” and no single factor is dispositive. *Id.* (citation omitted). Moreover, courts are not to merely tally the factors on each side. *In re Radmax, Ltd.*, 720 F.3d 285, 290 n.8 (5th Cir. 2013). Instead, courts “must make factual determinations to ascertain the degree of actual convenience, if any, and whether such rises to the level of ‘clearly more convenient.’” *Quest NetTech*, 2019 WL 6344267, at *7 (citing *In re Radmax*, 720 F.3d at 290 (holding that, where five factors were neutral, two weighed in favor of transfer, and one weighed “solidly” in favor of transfer, the movant had met its burden)); *see also In re Radmax*, 720 F.3d at 290 (holding that courts abuse their discretion when they deny transfer solely because the plaintiff’s choice of forum weighs in favor of denying transfer).

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