

**ANALYSIS OF AGREEMENT CONTAINING
CONSENT ORDER TO AID PUBLIC COMMENT**
In the Matter of U-Haul International, Inc. and AMERCO, File No. 081 0157

The Federal Trade Commission has accepted, subject to final approval, an agreement containing a proposed consent order with U-Haul International, Inc. and its parent company AMERCO (collectively referred to as “U-Haul” or “Respondents”). The agreement settles charges that U-Haul violated Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45, by inviting its closest competitor in the consumer truck rental industry to join with U-Haul in a collusive scheme to raise rates. The proposed consent order has been placed on the public record for 30 days to receive comments from interested persons. Comments received during this period will become part of the public record. After 30 days, the Commission will review the agreement and the comments received, and will decide whether it should withdraw from the agreement or make the proposed order final.

The purpose of this analysis is to facilitate comment on the proposed order. The analysis does not constitute an official interpretation of the agreement and proposed order, and does not modify their terms in any way. Further, the proposed consent order has been entered into for settlement purposes only, and does not constitute an admission by Respondents that it violated the law or that the facts alleged in the complaint (other than jurisdictional facts) are true.

I. The Complaint

The allegations of the complaint are summarized below:

U-Haul is the largest consumer truck rental company in the United States. Edward J. Shoen is the Chairman, President and Director of AMERCO, and the Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of U-Haul International, Inc. U-Haul’s primary competitors in the truck rental industry are Avis Budget Group, Inc. (“Budget”) and Penske Truck Leasing Co., L.P. (“Penske”).

A. Private Communications

For several years leading up to 2006, Mr. Shoen was aware that price competition from Budget was forcing U-Haul to lower its rates for one-way truck rentals. In 2006, Mr. Shoen developed a strategy in an attempt to eliminate this competition and thereby secure higher rates. Mr. Shoen instructed U-Haul regional managers to raise rates for truck rentals, and then contact Budget to inform Budget of U-Haul’s conditional rate increase and encourage Budget to follow, or U-Haul’s rates would be reduced to the original level.

At about the same time, Mr. Shoen also instructed local U-Haul dealers to communicate with their counterparts at Budget and Penske, with the purpose of re-enforcing the message that U-Haul had raised its rates, and competitors’ rates should be raised to match the increased U-Haul rates.

In late 2006 and thereafter, U-Haul representatives contacted Budget and invited price collusion as instructed by Mr. Shoen. The complaint includes specific allegations regarding the U-Haul operation in Tampa, Florida.

U-Haul's regional manager for the Tampa area is Robert Magyar. In October 2006, Mr. Magyar received from Mr. Shoen the instructions described above. In response to Mr. Shoen's directive, Mr. Magyar increased U-Haul's rates for one-way truck rentals commencing in the Tampa area. Next, Mr. Magyar telephoned Budget and communicated to Budget representatives that U-Haul had raised its rates in Tampa, and that the new rates could be viewed on the U-Haul web-site.

One year later, in October 2007, Mr. Magyar again contacted several local Budget locations. Mr. Magyar communicated to Budget that U-Haul had increased its one-way truck rental rates, and that Budget should increase its rates as well. In an e-mail message addressed to U-Haul's most senior executives, Mr. Magyar related the conversations, as follows:

I have also called 3 major Budget locations in Tampa and told them who I am, I spoke about the .40 per mile rates to SE Florida and told them I was killing them on rentals to that area and I am setting new rates to the area to increase revenue per rental. I encouraged them to monitor my rates and to move their rates up. And they did.

B. Public Communications

In late 2007, Mr. Shoen decided that U-Haul should attempt to lead an increase in rates for one-way truck rentals across the United States. Mr. Shoen understood that this rate increase could be sustained only if Budget followed. On November 19, 2007, Mr. Shoen instructed U-Haul regional managers to raise prices. His expectation was that Budget would follow this rate increase.

However, Budget did not immediately match U-Haul's higher rates. U-Haul instructed its regional managers to maintain the new, higher rates for a while longer, in case Budget should take note and decide to follow.

U-Haul held an earnings conference call on February 7, 2008. Mr. Shoen was aware that Budget representatives would monitor the call. Mr. Shoen opened the earnings conference call with a short statement, noting U-Haul's efforts "to show price leadership."¹ When asked for additional information on industry pricing, Mr. Shoen made the following points:

¹ A complete transcript of the earnings conference call is annexed to the complaint as Exhibit A.

1. U-Haul is acting as the industry price leader. The company has recently raised its rates, and competitors should do the same.
2. To date, Budget has not matched U-Haul's higher rates. This is unfortunate for the entire industry.
3. U-Haul will wait a while longer for Budget to respond appropriately, otherwise it will drop its rates.
4. In order to keep U-Haul from dropping its rates, Budget does not have to match U-Haul's rates precisely. U-Haul will tolerate a small price differential, but only a small price differential. Specifically, a 3 to 5 percent price difference is acceptable.
5. For U-Haul, market share is more important than price. U-Haul will not permit Budget to gain market share at U-Haul's expense.

With regard to both the private and public communications, U-Haul acted with the specific intent to facilitate collusion and increase the prices it could charge for truck rentals.

II. Analysis

The term "invitation to collude" describes an improper communication from a firm to an actual or potential competitor that the firm is ready and willing to coordinate on price or output. Such invitations to collude increase the risk of anticompetitive harm to consumers, and as such, can violate Section 5 of the FTC Act.²

If the invitation is accepted and the two firms reach an agreement, the Commission will allege collusion and refer the matter to the Department of Justice for a criminal investigation. In this case, the complaint does not allege that U-Haul and Budget reached an agreement, despite Mr. Magyar's report to his bosses that he privately encouraged Budget to raise its rates "and they did." *See* Complaint Paragraph 19.

² *In the Matter of Valassis Communications, Inc.*, 141 F.T.C. ____ (C-4160) (2006); *In the Matter of MacDermid, Inc.*, 129 F.T.C. ____ (C-3911) (2000); *In the Matter of Stone Container Corp.*, 125 F.T.C. 853 (1998); *In the Matter of Precision Moulding Co.*, 122 F.T.C. 104 (1996); *In the Matter of YKK (USA) Inc.*, 116 F.T.C. 628 (1993); *In the Matter of A.E. Clevite, Inc.*, 116 F.T.C. 389 (1993); *In the Matter of Quality Trailer Products Corp.*, 115 F.T.C. 944 (1992). In addition, invitations to collude may be violations of Section 2 of the Sherman Act as acts of attempted monopolization (*United States v. American Airlines*, 743 F.2d 1114 (5th Cir. 1984), *cert. dismissed*, 474 U.S. 1001 (1985)); as well as violations under the federal wire and mail fraud statutes, (*United States v. Ames Sintering Co.*, 927 F.2d 232 (6th Cir. 1990)).

Even if no agreement was reached it does not necessarily mean that no competitive harm was done.³ An unaccepted invitation to collude may facilitate coordinated interaction by disclosing the solicitor's intentions and preferences. For example, in this case Budget learned from Mr. Magyar that if Budget raised its rates U-Haul would not undercut Budget. Thus, the improper communication from U-Haul could have encouraged Budget to raise rates. Similarly, the public statements made by the CEO of U-Haul could have encouraged competitors to raise rates.

Although this case involves particularly egregious conduct, it is possible that less egregious conduct may result in Section 5 liability. It is not essential that the Commission find repeated misconduct attributable to senior executives, or define a market, or show market power, or establish substantial competitive harm, or even find that the terms of the desired agreement have been communicated with precision.

III. The Proposed Consent Order

U-Haul has signed a consent agreement containing the proposed consent order. The proposed consent order consists of seven sections that work together to enjoin U-Haul from inviting collusion and from entering into or implementing a collusive scheme.

Section II, Paragraph A of the proposed consent order enjoins U-Haul from inviting a competitor to divide markets, to allocate customers, or to fix prices. Section II, Paragraph C prohibits U-Haul from entering into, participating in, maintaining, organizing, implementing, enforcing, inviting, offering or soliciting an agreement with any competitor to divide markets, to allocate customers, or to fix prices. Section II, Paragraph B bars U-Haul from discussing rates with its competitors, with a proviso permitting legitimate market research.

The proviso in Section II, Paragraph D prevents the proposed order from interfering with U-Haul's efforts to negotiate prices with prospective customers, and it would permit U-Haul to provide investors with considerable information about company strategy. This proviso also permits U-Haul to communicate publicly any information required by the federal securities laws.

³ The Commission has previously explained that there are several legal and economic reasons to punish firms that invite collusion even when acceptance cannot be proven. First, it may be difficult to determine whether a particular solicitation has or has not been accepted. Second, the conduct may be harmful and serves no legitimate business purpose. Third, even an unaccepted solicitation may facilitate coordinated interaction by disclosing the intentions or preferences of the party issuing the invitation. *In the Matter of Valassis Communications, Inc.*, Analysis of Agreement Containing Consent Order To Aid Public Comment, 71 Fed. Reg. 13976, 13978-79 (Mar. 20, 2006). See generally P. Areeda & H. Hovenkamp, VI ANTITRUST LAW ¶1419 (2003).

Sections III, IV, V, and VI of the proposed order include several terms that are common to many Commission orders, facilitating the Commission's efforts to monitor respondents' compliance with the order. Section IV, Paragraph A requires a periodic submission to the Commission of unredacted copies of certain internal U-Haul documents. This provision is necessary because U-Haul impeded the Federal Trade Commission's investigation of this matter. Specifically, U-Haul submitted to the Commission, in response to a *subpoena duces tecum*, documents authored by Mr. Shoen, from which were redacted many of the sentences quoted in the complaint. In the Commission's view, there was no justification for the redaction. The proposed order should deter repetition of this conduct.

Finally, Section VII provides that the proposed order will expire in 20 years.