



SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE

COUNSEL/ENDORSEMENT SLIP

COURT FILE NO.: BK-24-03003083-0031

DATE: March 6, 2024

NO. ON LIST: 6

TITLE OF PROCEEDING: IN THE MATTER OF THE BANKRUPTCY OF CREATIVE WEALTH MEDIA FINANCE CORP.

BEFORE: JUSTICE PENNY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

For Moving Party:

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For Other:

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ENDORSEMENT OF JUSTICE PENNY (Released March 7, 2024):

- [1] In this motion, the Trustee in Bankruptcy of Creative Wealth Management Finance Inc. (“Finance”) seeks orders granting the Trustee access to the books and records of Finance and establishing protocols for the delivery of these books and records to the Trustee.
- [2] The substantive problem at the heart of the current dispute arises from the fact that Finance is one of several of Creative Wealth Management (CWM) affiliated companies. Only Finance is in bankruptcy. All of the CWM group share office space in Toronto and, more importantly, the books and records for the entire CWM group are, allegedly, intermingled. In these Reasons, I will use the term “Books and Records” to refer only to the books and records of Finance.
- [3] The central issues on this motion are:
- 1) who should separate out the Books and Records from the intermingled records of the CWM group, and how? and
 - 2) who should pay the cost of the unmingling exercise?
- [4] There are additional, collateral issues which I will address in the course of these Reasons.

Background

- [5] On October 27, 2023, Finance issued a notice of intention to make a proposal under the BIA. Finance was deemed to have filed an assignment bankruptcy on November 28, 2023. The initial trustee was not provided with access to the Books and Records of Finance.
- [6] The proposal trustee was replaced by the present Trustee at the first meeting of creditors on December 15, 2023. Beginning on January 3, 2024, the Trustee made repeated requests for access to Finance’s books and records, without avail. After weeks, on January 22, continuing on January 31, 2024, the Trustee was finally able to meet at the CWM business premises with Mr. Cloth, who is a shareholder and one of the officers and directors of Finance and other CMW companies.¹ He attended with his counsel, Mr. Ullman, and with in-house counsel for Creative Wealth Management Lending Inc (“Lending”).
- [7] The Trustee was advised at these meetings that: all of Finance’s Books and Records were stored online; the Books and Records were intermingled with the books and records of other CWM entities; CWM Lending, specifically, was asserting privilege; access to the Finance Books and Records would not be granted at that time; and, a letter would be forthcoming from Mr. Ullman setting out the position of the non-Finance CWM entities with respect to the Trustee’s access.

¹ I was advised that the two shareholder of the CWM group are Mr. Cloth and a Mr. Tennyson and that the directors and officers of the group were Mr. Cloth and Mr. McConnell.

- [8] Counsel for the Trustee followed up on February 6 and 19, 2024, requesting access to the Books and Records. Access was not forthcoming, nor was any plan or proposed protocol for granting access.
- [9] On February 23, 2024, the Trustee brought a motion, *ex parte*, for an order granting it access to the Books and Records. Justice Wilton-Siegal declined to grant any relief, other than an interim preservation order.
- [10] At the return of the motion on notice before me, Mr. Cloth filed no evidence or submissions, other than a brief “aide memoire” from his counsel. His counsel was in attendance and made submissions. Counsel for Lending filed evidence and a factum, and made submissions. Various creditors of Finance also filed material, were in attendance, and made brief submissions.
- [11] It became clear that the CWM group is involved in other insolvency proceedings in British Columbia, where it is in conflict with various creditors, and that there is other litigation extant, including against Mr. Cloth, initiated by CWM group creditors (including creditors of Finance). This provides context for the highly acrimonious and disputed nature of the relief sought on the motion.

The legal framework

- [12] The Trustee has a duty to the Finance’s creditors to obtain the greatest possible value for the bankrupt estate. Section 16(3) of the BIA provides that the Trustee must take possession of the bankrupt’s deeds, books, records, documents and all property. No person is entitled to withhold possession of the books of account belonging to the bankrupt or any papers or documents, including material in electronic form relating to the accounts or to any trade dealings of the bankrupt. The Trustee must take possession of the deeds, books, documents and assets as soon as possible after the bankruptcy.
- [13] Further, s. 158 of the BIA imposes a duty on a bankrupt to make discovery of and deliver to the Trustee all books, records, documents, writings and papers that in any way relate to the bankrupt’s property or affairs. The BIA requires a bankrupt and, where the bankrupt is a corporation, its officers or directors, to generally do all such acts and things in relation to Finance’s property and the distribution of that property among Finance’s creditors as may be reasonably required by the Trustee.
- [14] Section 167 of the BIA also requires any person who has or is believed or suspected to have any book, document or paper of any kind relating in whole or in part to the bankrupt or its dealings or property, to produce those documents. While s. 164 does not entitle the Trustee to seize the documents or property of a third party, the court has held that s. 167 includes a right of the Trustee to inspect such documents even where they are another person’s property, as long as they relate in whole or in part to the bankrupt, its dealings or its property. This inspection right does not abrogate the law of solicitor client privilege, however.
- [15] Mr. Ullman and others have suggested that the Trustee does not really need all the Books and Records and that there is no urgency because recovery on Finance’s accounts receivable is tied to royalty payments on movies and will take a long time. I utterly reject all such arguments. It is not for the bankrupt, its shareholders officers or directors, or anyone else for that matter, to tell the Trustee what it does and does not need, or when. There is no doubt that the Trustee is entitled to immediate access to the Books and Records. This is not in serious dispute.
- [16] Mr. Ullman also suggested that the process of separating the Books and Records from the rest of the CWM group’s records will be costly and is unnecessary. He says the request is “premature” and that the most important documents have already been provided. There was, among other things, a complete lack of any evidence to support these propositions.

[17] By the end of submissions, it had become obvious that the necessary path forward is to extract the Books and Records from the intermingled records of the other CWM entities so that the Trustee will have unimpeded access to them. I will now turn to the two principal issues raised by this conclusion.

Who should separate out the Books and Records and how?

[18] There is a serious dispute between the Trustee and Lending about by whom, and how, the CWM records should be reviewed and analyzed to separate out the Books and Records. The Trustee takes the position that, in view of the common ownership and common officers and directors, there can be no suggestion of adversity of interest between Finance and the other CWM entities, specifically Lending. As a result, the Trustee proposes to utilize its related forensic investigation enterprise, RSM Consulting's Digital Forensics and Incident Response Team.

[19] I cannot agree. Once the Trustee was appointed, the fate of Finance was in the hands of the Trustee and the inspectors/creditors of Finance. Their interests are potentially adverse to the interests of the remaining members of the CWM group. Indeed, it seems almost certain to be so.

[20] In my view, the required forensic investigation and unmingling of records must be conducted by an independent expert appointed by the court. To this end, the parties shall endeavor to agree on the appropriate choice of investigator. If they are unable to do so, they will each choose a preferred individual and provide me with: a) the CV of the proposed expert; a consent to act; confirmation they have no conflicts; and, confirmation that they understand the role of a court-appointed expert regarding independence and objectivity, similar in nature (with necessary modifications) to the declaration required of expert witnesses under the Rules of Civil Procedure. This may be accompanied by a brief submission, not to exceed one typed, double-spaced page, addressing why their proposed candidate is to be preferred over the other proposed candidate.

[21] The protocols for the work of the investigator must include provisions to ensure preservation of CWM claims of solicitor client privilege. It shall also contain provisions which reflect the issues addressed in para. 6 of the Trustee's proposed draft order, starting at page E11 of the CaseLines in the March 6, 2024 bundle.

[22] Any other issues which cannot be resolved between the parties may be spoken to at a case conference convened for that purpose.

Who should pay the cost of the unmingling exercise?

[23] The Trustee maintains that because the CWM group saw fit to conduct its record keeping on an intermingled basis, it should pay the cost of unmingling Finance's Books and Records. Lending maintains that it was entitled to conduct its affairs as it saw fit and that it is Finance's estate which should pay the cost of satisfying the Trustee's need for the Books and Records.

[24] I order that the cost of the court-appointed independent investigator shall, in the short run, be born equally (that is, on a 50/50 basis) by the Finance estate on the one hand and the remainder of the CWM group on the other. This shall be without prejudice to the right of either party to revisit this issue once the job is done. At this point, next to nothing is known about the extent, of, reasons for, and consequences of the intermingling of the CWM financial records. With the benefit of the work and findings of the independent investigator, there will be a more robust record to assess the need for all of this, its causes and consequences.

Costs of the motion

[25] Both the Trustee and Lending seek their costs of this motion. In light of my disposition, neither side was entirely successful. I make no order as to costs.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Penny J.", followed by a period.

Penny J.