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Counsel for Plaintiffs and Proposed Class

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
OAKLAND DIVISION**

19 LLE ONE, LLC, d/b/a Crowd Siren and d/b/a
20 Social Media Models, and JONATHAN
21 MURDOUGH, on behalf of themselves and all
22 others similarly situated,

Plaintiffs,

v.

24 FACEBOOK, INC.,

Defendant.

Case No.: 4:16-cv-06232-JSW

**PLAINTIFFS' OPPOSITION TO
SEALING PORTIONS OF FOURTH
AMENDED COMPLAINT**

Dept: Courtroom 5, 2nd Floor
Judge: Jeffrey S. White

INTRODUCTION

1
2 When the Wall Street Journal first reported that Facebook had overstated the average video
3 view times it reported to advertisers, Facebook responded with an extensive and carefully
4 orchestrated campaign to convince the public that the overstatement was the result of an honest
5 mistake that Facebook had only just discovered, and that Facebook had corrected that mistake
6 immediately. Now that Plaintiffs have uncovered internal documents showing that Facebook was
7 not telling the truth—or at the very least, was not telling the complete story—Facebook wants its
8 handling of the metrics error treated as if it were a trade secret and screened from public view.

9 Based on what they learned in discovery, Plaintiffs amended their complaint to allege a
10 claim for fraud. They allege that Facebook engineers knew exactly how the company was
11 calculating its averages but did nothing about it for over a year; that throughout 2015, Facebook
12 ignored reports from advertisers of aberrant results caused by Facebook’s method of calculation;
13 and that Facebook severely understaffed the engineering team in charge of fixing calculation errors.
14 (4th Am. Compl. [ECF No. 140-3], ¶¶ 3, 5, 57-62.) They further allege that even after Facebook
15 finally got around to addressing the error, it delayed the fix for several more months while it
16 developed a plan to “obfuscate the fact we screwed up the math,” and that Facebook is still
17 concealing the degree by which it overstated average view times: Facebook reported view times
18 inflated by some 150 to 900%, not merely 60 to 80%, as had been reported. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 4, 6, 63-69.)

19 Facebook asks the Court to permanently seal these allegations, ensuring the public will
20 never know the basis for Plaintiffs’ fraud claim. But transparency is an indispensable element of
21 our judicial system, particularly when the matters being adjudicated are of public significance, and
22 Facebook has not overcome the “strong presumption” in favor of public access. Facebook cannot
23 identify any trade secret that would be disclosed, as none of Plaintiffs’ allegations reveal any highly
24 technical or proprietary information. Nor can it specify how a competitor might use the information
25 in Plaintiffs’ complaint to gain an unfair advantage, particularly since Facebook has since changed
26 its auditing and verification practices. If the disclosure of Plaintiffs’ allegations hurt Facebook at
27 all, it’s only because they state a legitimate claim for fraud and reveal Facebook’s prior public
28 statements as dishonest. As the Ninth Circuit has emphasized, however, litigants have no right to

1 seal information related to the merits of a public proceeding just because that information may
2 prove incriminating or embarrassing. This litigation concerns a matter of public importance—one
3 that has affected over a million advertisers. Facebook’s error was covered widely in the national
4 media even before Plaintiffs filed suit, and Facebook itself has spoken publicly about its handling of
5 the error on several occasions. Facebook has no legitimate reason for cutting off public access now.

6 **BACKGROUND**

7 On September 22, 2016, the Wall Street Journal reported that, for the past two years,
8 Facebook had overstated the average time its users spent watching paid video advertisements. (4th
9 Am. Compl., ¶ 1.) Facebook quickly responded with a public statement that was covered by media
10 outlets around the world. It emphasized that the inflated metrics were the result of an “error”; that
11 Facebook only learned about that error “about a month ago”; and that “[a]s soon as we discovered
12 the discrepancy, we fixed it.” (4th Am. Compl., ¶ 2.)

13 When Plaintiffs first filed this class action on behalf of advertisers who bought video ads on
14 Facebook, they knew only what Facebook had said publicly and what news media like the Wall
15 Street Journal had reported. Plaintiffs alleged that, even if Facebook’s inflated metrics resulted
16 from an honest mistake, it still should not be permitted to keep the advertising revenue that mistake
17 generated. Both its contractual obligations to advertisers and principles of fair competition required
18 that Facebook disgorge its unearned profits. (ECF No. 34.) In response, Facebook reiterated that it
19 “inadvertently miscalculated” the metrics at issue, that it discovered this error “[I]ast fall” (2016),
20 and that it had “proactively disclosed and fixed these bugs.” (ECF No. 46 at 2.)

21 Plaintiffs have since gained access to Facebook’s internal records and discovered that
22 Facebook’s inflation of average view times was far from an honest mistake. Based on what they
23 learned, Plaintiffs amended their complaint to allege a claim for fraud and punitive damages. (4th
24 Am. Compl., ¶¶ 1-7, 57-69, 113-118.) Facebook now wants the Court to shield the basis of the new
25 fraud claim from public view. Among the material Facebook wants permanently sealed are:

26 (i) Allegations that Facebook did not discover its mistake a month before the Wall Street
27 Journal article, as Facebook claimed publicly. Facebook engineers knew how Facebook was
28 calculating average view time for over a year, and multiple advertisers had reported aberrant results

1 caused by that method of calculation (*Id.*, ¶¶ 3, 58-59.)

2 (ii) Allegations that Facebook’s average viewership metrics were not inflated by only 60-
3 80%, as was widely reported and left uncorrected by Facebook. They were inflated by some 150 to
4 900%. Facebook knows that the vast majority of the video ads paced on its platform are viewed for
5 an average of only a few seconds. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 4, 66-68.)

6 (iii) Allegations that Facebook displayed reckless indifference to the accuracy of its
7 metrics by severely understaffing the engineering team in charge of correcting errors, not taking
8 advertiser reports of anomalous results seriously, and failing to complete investigations in a timely
9 manner. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 5, 58, 63.)

10 (iv) Allegations that Facebook did not fix the error as soon as it discovered it, as it has
11 claimed repeatedly. Even once Facebook decided to change the way it calculated the average
12 viewership metrics, it continued disseminating inflated metrics for months. Meanwhile, Facebook
13 was developing a “no PR” approach that would allow it to quietly replace its erroneous metrics and
14 obfuscate the fact they had been drastically inflated for well over a year. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 6, 63-65.)

15 ARGUMENT

16 **A. Facebook Must Overcome A Strong Presumption In Favor of Public Access 17 To Justify Keeping Plaintiffs’ Allegations Secret**

18 Documents filed in a judicial proceeding, like Plaintiffs’ complaint, are “public documents
19 almost by definition, and the public is entitled to access by default.” *Kamakana v. City & Cty. of
20 Honolulu*, 447 F.3d 1172, 1180 (9th Cir. 2006). This “strong presumption” in favor of public
21 access is a fundamental part of our judicial system, which depends on transparency and public faith
22 that justice is being administered fairly. *Ctr. for Auto Safety v. Chrysler Grp.*, 809 F.3d 1092, 1096
23 (9th Cir. 2016). The more entwined a filing is with the merits of a case, the more powerful the
24 public interest in transparency. *See id.* at 1101. And where, as here, the filing at issue is a
25 complaint, that interest is particularly strong. After all, a complaint is “the root, the foundation, the
26 basis by which a suit arises and must be disposed of.” *Heath v. Google Inc.*, No. 15-CV-01824-
27 BLF, 2017 WL 3530593, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Aug. 14, 2017).

28 Because public access to records is the default, the Court need not make a detailed finding to
justify a denial of Facebook’s sealing request. *Kamakana*, 447 F.3d at 1182 (“It makes little sense

1 ... to require the same specificity where the court is simply effectuating the presumption of public
 2 access by *unsealing* documents covered by a blanket protective order.”) To justify permanently
 3 sealing portions of Plaintiffs’ complaint, however, Facebook would need to overcome the strong
 4 presumption in favor of public access by proving that “compelling reasons” exist for keeping the
 5 allegations secret. *Id.* at 1178. In assessing Facebook’s showing, the Court is not permitted to rely
 6 on hypothesis or conjecture, must balance any truly compelling reasons against the competing
 7 interests of the public, and must articulate the factual basis for any sealing that it might order. *Id.*

8 **B. Facebook Has Not Presented Compelling Reasons For Sealing the Allegations**

9 **1. Facebook Cannot Show That Allegations Relevant to Plaintiffs’ Fraud
 10 Claims Are Being Used As A Vehicle For Improper Purposes**

11 “In general, ‘compelling reasons’ sufficient to outweigh the public’s interest in disclosure
 12 and justify sealing court records exist when such ‘court files might have become a vehicle for
 13 improper purposes,’ such as the use of records to gratify private spite, promote public scandal,
 14 circulate libelous statements, or release trade secrets.” *Kamakana*, 447 F.3d at 1179. However, the
 15 “mere fact that the production of records may lead to a litigant’s embarrassment, incrimination, or
 16 exposure to further litigation will not, without more, compel the court to seal its records.” *Id.*

17 Facebook claims that compelling reasons exist here because “Plaintiffs attempt ... to use the
 18 complaint as a vehicle to publicly disclose their mischaracterizations of Facebook’s confidential
 19 information.” (Def. Br. at 2.) It cites two cases where courts found allegations were intended to
 20 gratify spite or promote scandal. (*Id.* at 4.) In *Cooksey v. Digital*, the court sealed allegations that
 21 the “defendant or its counsel destroyed evidence or violated legal or ethical standards,” finding that
 22 the allegations were “plainly contradict[ed]” by the record, and therefore were “frivolous and could
 23 not affect the decisions in the case.” No. 14-CV-7146, 2016 WL 316853, at *3 (S.D.N.Y. Jan. 26,
 24 2016). And in *Accenture v. Sidhu*, the court sealed an allegation “which implies [Defendant] is in
 25 the United States illegally—a fact which is neither demonstrated by any evidence in the record nor
 26 relevant to any of the claims against [Defendant].” No. C10-2977 TEH, 2011 WL 6057597, at *3
 27 (N.D. Cal. Dec. 6, 2011). But the court found that the bulk of the challenged allegations—which
 28 the defendant, like Facebook here, claimed were wrong, intended to cause reputational harm, and
 would result in unflattering media attention—fell into the category of embarrassment and thus

1 should not be sealed. *Id.* at *2.

2 The *Accenture* and *Cooksey* cases exemplify the rare instances where allegations in a
3 complaint will be considered a “vehicle for improper purposes” and stricken from the public record.
4 Only wholly irrelevant statements (such as questioning a litigant’s immigration status) or patently
5 false statements that could never figure in the Court’s adjudication of the merits (such as frivolous
6 accusations of evidence spoliation) are likely to qualify. The allegations of Plaintiffs’ complaint are
7 neither. Far from being “unrelated” to Plaintiffs’ fraud claim, the allegations form the very factual
8 basis for that claim. *Id.* at *3. Facebook has claimed publicly that it did not discover the inflated
9 metrics until “about a month” before September 23, 2016, that the inflated metrics were the result
10 of an honest mistake, and that as soon as Facebook found the error, it fixed it. Plaintiffs’ fraud
11 claim depends on showing that Facebook’s public statements are false, and that it either knew that it
12 was reporting inflated viewership metrics to advertisers or did so with reckless disregard for the
13 truth. (4th Am. Compl., ¶ 115.) The fact that at least three Facebook engineers were aware of how
14 Facebook was calculating its viewership metrics in early 2015 is thus highly relevant to Plaintiffs’
15 claim. (*Id.*, ¶¶ 3, 59.) As is the fact that multiple advertisers reported aberrant results caused by
16 Facebook’s calculation throughout 2015, but Facebook still did nothing (*id.*, ¶¶ 3, 58); the fact that
17 Facebook repeatedly displayed reckless indifference to the accuracy of its metrics by failing to
18 investigate error reports, failing to follow-up on complaints for months at a time, and understaffing
19 the team in charge of fixing errors (*id.*, ¶¶ 5, 60-62); and the fact that, even after Facebook resolved
20 to correct its calculation, it continued reporting inflated numbers for months, while it developed and
21 implemented a “no PR” plan intended to obfuscate what it had done (*id.*, ¶¶ 6, 63-69). The purpose
22 of Plaintiffs’ allegations, in other words, is entirely proper—they support a claim for fraud.

23 **2. Facebook’s Boilerplate Claims of Competitive Harm Are Insufficient**

24 Courts also sometimes find compelling reasons for sealing documents when a defendant
25 shows it will suffer competitive harm from the disclosure of trade secrets or other proprietary
26 information. “[A]s a number of courts in this district have suggested,” however, “‘only documents
27 of *exceptionally sensitive information*’ will be kept from the public.” *O’Connor v. Uber Techs.,*
28 *Inc.*, No. C-13-3826 EMC-2015 WL 355496, at *1 (N.D. Cal. Jan. 27, 2015) (emphasis in original).

1 Facebook contends that Plaintiffs’ allegations fall into this category, and that it will suffer
2 competitive harm if the allegations are made public. But “conclusory offerings” and “boilerplate
3 references to competitive disadvantage” are not enough to overcome the strong presumption in
4 favor of public access. *Kamakana*, 447 F.3d at 1182; *Welle v. Provident Life & Accident Ins. Co.*,
5 No. 3:12-cv-3016 EMC, 2013 WL 6055369, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 14, 2013). Facebook “has failed
6 to make a particularized showing regarding *what* the trade secret or intellectual property actually
7 is”—it just says that Plaintiffs’ allegations are drawn from confidential documents. *Ramirez v.*
8 *Trans Union, LLC*, 2017 WL 1549330, at *2 (N.D. Cal. May 1, 2017). Nor does Facebook explain
9 how competitors would be able to use this information to its detriment—Facebook just says they
10 would. *See Hodges v. Apple*, No. 13-cv-01128-WHO, 2013 WL 6070408, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Nov.
11 18, 2013) (“[a]n unsupported assertion of unfair advantage to competitors without explaining how a
12 competitor would use the information to obtain an unfair advantage is insufficient”).

13 Rather than identifying specific trade secrets or explaining exactly how competitors would
14 use those supposed secrets to its detriment, Facebook’s supporting declaration merely repeats the
15 same generic reasons for every allegation it seeks to seal. Facebook claims that disclosure could
16 “chill free and open discussions of issues in the future.” (Mellon Decl., ¶¶ 3-8; *see also id.* ¶¶ 10-17
17 (incorporating reasons stated in ¶¶ 3-8).) But it cites no precedent for sealing documents on that
18 basis, and it would seem to extend to almost any incriminatory statement revealed through internal
19 company documents. Courts are not permitted to seal information based “on hypothesis or
20 conjecture.” *Ctr. for Auto Safety*, 809 F.3d at 1096. Consistent with that principle, courts faced
21 with similar hypothetical forecasts that disclosure would deter candid discussion have rejected them
22 as insufficient to overcome the strong presumption in favor of public access. *Kenny v. Pac. Inv.*
23 *Mgmt. Co. LLC*, 2018 WL 3328224, at *3–4 (W.D. Wash. July 6, 2018) (rejecting sealing request
24 where defendants failed to “submit sufficient evidence that public revelations of these documents
25 would chill board discussions”); *Gregory v. City of Vallejo*, No. 2:13-CV-00320-KJM, 2014 WL
26 4187365, at *3 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 21, 2014) (“plaintiffs fail to articulate any support for, or point to
27 any authority in support of, their remaining conclusory argument that ‘[p]ublic filing of these
28 records would ... remove the protections for officers to be candid”).

1 Facebook also repeats, for nearly every allegation that it seeks to seal, the conclusory
2 contention that the allegation “mischaracterizes the underlying information, and, if publicly
3 disclosed, would mislead its audience and could be used by Facebook’s competitors to cause it
4 competitive harm.” (Mellon Decl., ¶¶ 3-4, 6-9; ¶¶ 10-17 (incorporation reasons from ¶¶ 3-9).) It
5 similarly repeats throughout its brief the accusation that Plaintiffs “mischaracterized the underlying
6 information” and that disclosure “would mislead their audience.” (Def. Br. at 1, 2, 4.) Yet
7 Facebook is again unable to cite any precedent for sealing information on this basis, and it appears
8 to be an argument that any defendant could make if it would guarantee secrecy. Like its “chilling”
9 argument, Facebook’s “mischaracterization” argument is far too conclusory and speculative to
10 satisfy the compelling reasons standard. *See Kawakama*, 447 F.3d at 1182 (rejecting “conclusory
11 statements” that disclosure would cast defendant’s officers “in a false light”). Nearly every litigant
12 believes the other side is mischaracterizing the facts. That’s often the whole point of litigation: to
13 resolve which party’s characterization of the evidence is more persuasive. And under Ninth Circuit
14 law, that dueling characterization of evidence is supposed to take place in full view of the public.

15 Notably, Facebook never explains how its internal documents *should* be characterized—
16 much less how mischaracterized information would be useful to its competitors. But if it is really
17 concerned that some unspecified “audience” will be misled, it is free to disclose the underlying
18 documents and state its position publicly. Facebook certainly has had no problem getting its
19 position into circulation: its prior public statements about inflated viewership metrics were carried
20 by the New York Times, USA Today, and dozens if not hundreds of other publications. *See, e.g.*,
21 John Herrman and Sapn Maheshwari, *Facebook Apologizes for Overstating Video Metrics*, N.Y.
22 Times, Sept. 23, 2016, <https://nyti.ms/2d6mONn>; Jessica Guynn, *Facebook Apologizes for Inflating*
23 *Video Numbers*, USA Today, Sept. 23, 2016, <http://usat.ly/2dpszWR>. And as Facebook has
24 frequently emphasized to the press, it has changed its business practices and now takes the accuracy
25 of its video metrics more seriously. *See, e.g.*, Steve Lohr and Sapna Maheshwari, *Facebook Acts to*
26 *Restore Trust After Overstating Video Views*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 16, 2016,
27 <https://nyti.ms/2f1QBmW>; Mike Shields, *Facebook Agrees to Audit of its Metrics Following Data*
28 *Controversy*, Wall St. J., Feb. 10, 2017, <https://goo.gl/hyVvfb>. It remains to be seen whether those

1 changes are enough, but by Facebook’s own account, the specifics alleged in Plaintiffs’ complaint
 2 are stale and no longer reflect how it does business. *See Ramirez*, 2017 WL 1549330 at *3, 6
 3 (denying motion to seal where information was stale and no longer of potential use to competitors);
 4 *Kenny*, 2018 WL 3328224 at *2 (“whatever confidential analysis [the internal document] is stale
 5 and no longer likely to offer a complete advantage to [defendant’s] competitors”).

6 **3. Facebook Has Not Shown 3rd Party Privacy Concerns Are Implicated**

7 Facebook also claims that two portions of Plaintiffs’ complaint should be sealed because
 8 they would disclose third parties’ confidential information. (Def. Br. at 5.) These portions, found
 9 in Paragraphs 4 and 66 of Plaintiffs’ complaint, allege that Facebook’s average viewership metrics
 10 were not inflated by only 60 to 80%—they were inflated by some 150 to 900%. For example, when
 11 Facebook summarized the impact of the miscalculation internally, it presented two typical cases: in
 12 the first, Facebook had inflated Average Duration of Video Viewed from 2.0 seconds to 17.5
 13 seconds (an increase of 775%); in the other, Facebook had inflated Average Duration of Video
 14 Viewed from 2.4 seconds to 17.3 seconds (an increase of 621%). (4th Am. Compl., ¶ 66.)

15 None of these allegations contain any identifying information, which is the critical fact
 16 courts consider when deciding whether and how much of a third party’s private information should
 17 be sealed. *See O’Connor*, 2015 WL 355496 at *2 (non-party’s interest “can be appropriately
 18 balanced with the public’s right to access by redacting personal identifying information”).
 19 Facebook has not explained how disclosure of only aggregate data and representative samples could
 20 possibly cause harm to third parties, and Plaintiffs’ counsel—who have a responsibility to safeguard
 21 the interest of absent class members—can see none. Disclosure “would not injure [any] third
 22 parties but would reveal only [Facebook’s] actions”—namely, that it inflated the average
 23 viewership times it reported to the putative class by some 150 to 900%. *Foltz*, 331 F.3d at 1137.

24 In addition, the allegations go to the very heart of the case, as they show not only that
 25 Facebook was indeed overstating the average viewership time it reported to advertisers, but that it
 26 was overstating it by many multitudes. *Contrast G&C Auto Body Inc v. Geico Gen. Ins. Co.*, No.
 27 C06-04898 MJJ, 2008 WL 687372, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 11, 2008) (ordering third-party
 28 information redacted that was “of little or no relevance to the issues that were raised”). The actual

1 degree by which Facebook overstated its viewership metrics further supports Plaintiffs’ claim that it
 2 was not an honest mistake, but rather the result of knowing or reckless indifference to the accuracy
 3 of its metrics. The fact that Facebook concealed the extent to which it had inflated viewership
 4 metrics, even while it was loudly and publicly pledging a renewed commitment to transparency in
 5 the wake of the Wall Street Journal report, also supports Plaintiffs’ claim of fraud.

6 **C. Even if Facebook’s Reasons For Requesting Secrecy Were Compelling, The
 7 Public’s Interest in Disclosure Is More Compelling**

8 For the reasons discussed above, Facebook has not provided the detailed facts necessary to
 9 justify sealing Plaintiffs’ allegations under the stringent compelling-reasons standard. Even if it
 10 had, however, the Court would then need to “conscientiously balance the competing interests of the
 11 public and the party who seeks to keep certain judicial records secret.” *Ctr. for Auto Safety*, 809
 12 F.3d at 1096. Facebook contends that the public’s interest in disclosure is “markedly weak”
 13 because the “small number of allegations” it seeks to seal are not needed to understand the
 14 complaint. (Def. Br. at 2.) But those “small number of allegations” comprise almost every fact
 15 Plaintiffs have added to support their new claim for fraud, and are quite necessary for both absent
 16 class members and the public at large to understand why Plaintiffs contend Facebook inflated
 17 metrics constitute fraud—not an honest mistake as Facebook has repeatedly told the world.

18 Moreover, when Facebook complains that its behavior is “subject to significant public
 19 scrutiny,” it is making an argument in favor of disclosure—not against. (Def. Br. at 5.) “[T]he
 20 interest in access to court proceedings in general may be asserted *more* forcefully when the
 21 litigation involves matters of significant public concern.” *Cohen v. Trump*, No. 10-CV-0940-GPC-
 22 WVG, 2016 WL 3036302, at *6 (S.D. Cal. May 27, 2016) (emphasis added); *see also Kamakama*,
 23 447 F.3d at 1179 (disclosure ensures public understanding of “significant public events”); *Shane*
 24 *Grp., Inc. v. BCBS of Mich.*, No. 15-1544, 2016 WL 3163073, at *3-4 (6th Cir. June 7, 2016) (“the
 25 greater the public interest in the litigation’s subject matter, the greater the showing necessary to
 26 overcome the presumption of access”). That is true not only because the public has a strong interest
 27 in the subject matter of this lawsuit—as demonstrated by the Wall Street Journal’s report and
 28 extensive press coverage that followed—but because this case is being brought on behalf of
 members of the public. *See Shane*, 825 F.3d at 305 (“in class actions—where by definition ‘some

1 DATED: September 27, 2018

Respectfully submitted,

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