

Investigation probes Anheuser-Busch distribution practices

'The Wall Street Journal' reports the brewery may have used unfair marketing tactics

The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Anheuser-Busch Inc. confirmed today that the Justice Department's antitrust unit is

investigating how the brewery distributes its beer.

"We received a fax this morning from the Justice Department informing us that the department has begun a civil investigation into the distribution and sale of beer, including our company's policies and practices in marketing and distribution," Royce J.

Estes, Anheuser-Busch's vice president for corporate law, said in a statement.

Justice Department spokeswoman Gina Talamona also confirmed that the agency is investigating distribution practices in the industry, but she declined to say that Anheuser-Busch is the target.

The Wall Street Journal reported today that the department is looking into allegations that Anheuser-Busch, the nation's largest brewery, is engaging in unfair sales practices that elbow smaller brands out of the market.

Industry lawyers and executives told the newspaper the probe is mainly concerned with

the St. Louis-based brewer's aggressiveness in getting beer distributors to carry its products exclusively and its use of allegedly unfair marketing agreements.

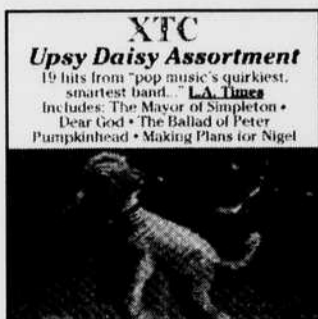
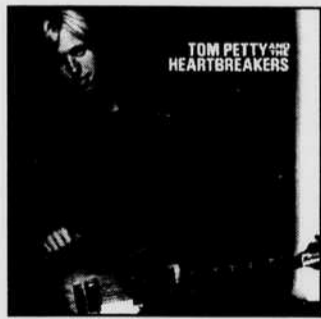
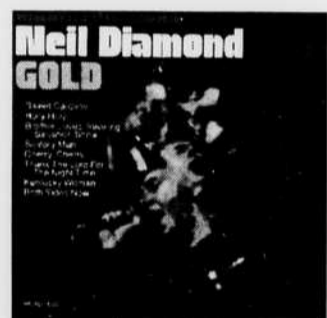
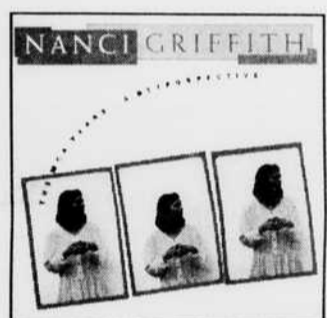
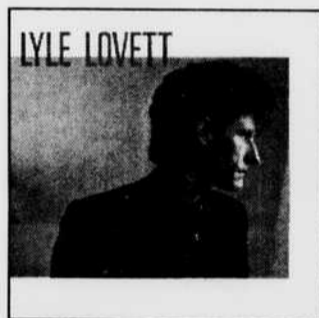
Estes said the brewery will cooperate with the investigation but denied claims that it is forcing wholesalers to distribute only Anheuser-Busch products.

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