

# EU: Microsoft agrees to unbundle Explorer from Windows

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(AP) -- Microsoft Corp. will offer computer users a choice of rival Web browsers to ward off new European Union antitrust fines, EU regulators and Microsoft said Friday.

Microsoft said its proposal, if accepted by the European Commission, would "fully address" antitrust worries over its [browser](#) and "would mark a big step forward in addressing a decade of legal issues."

The EU has charged the company with monopoly abuse for tying the Internet Explorer browser to the Windows operating system installed on most of the world's desktop computers.

It welcomed Microsoft's suggestions and said it will evaluate the proposal and seek input from other browser makers and computer companies before making a decision. If approved, the proposal could be legally binding for five years.

On the browser case, Microsoft is suggesting that users of Windows XP, Vista or its latest release Windows 7 who have Internet Explorer set as the default browser would see a Web page prompting them to pick from five of the most popular browsers in Europe. Existing Windows users would get the ballot screen from a software update.

Microsoft said the list of browsers would be reviewed twice a year based on usage data for the previous six months. Microsoft's browser is the most widely used worldwide, but Mozilla Corp.'s Firefox is gaining in popularity.

Mozilla and Google Inc. - which recently released a browser, Chrome - are supporting the case against Microsoft.

Windows would still include Internet Explorer, but users would be able to disable it. Computer manufacturers could also choose to install other browsers, set them as default and disable Internet Explorer.

The company had said in June that it would remove its browser from Windows entirely to avoid antitrust problems. Instead, it planned to give Internet Explorer away as a download or on a disc. EU regulators slammed the idea, saying the 5 percent of people who buy Windows off the shelf wouldn't have a real choice of browsers. Most people buy the software pre-installed on a computer assembled by manufacturers such as Dell Inc. or Hewlett-Packard Co.

Brad Smith, Microsoft's general counsel, said in a statement that until EU regulators rule on the company's proposal, it will continue to require

PC makers to sell computers with the browserless Windows 7 "E" version in the region. Windows 7 will go on sale on Oct. 22.

The ballot screen that Microsoft is proposing is close to what regulators called for in January when they asked Microsoft to offer several browsers on Windows. Under that proposal, PC companies would have been responsible for building the browser-choosing technology. That could have conflicted with existing deals in which browser and Web search companies pay to have their products set as the default on new PCs.

Under Microsoft's plan, the software maker would handle the technology.

The original ballot-screen proposal was also backed by Norwegian mobile Internet browser maker Opera Software ASA, which triggered the EU antitrust case by complaining that Microsoft was unfairly using its power as the dominant supplier of operating system software to squeeze out rivals.

Opera lawyer Thomas Vinje welcomed Microsoft's announcement Friday but said "the devil is in the detail" on how far it would go to calm antitrust fears.

Offering the ballot screen to existing Windows users "will change the world," he said, because it would encourage developers to make cross-platform software based on Web standards instead of tailoring their work to Microsoft software.

Microsoft has said it fully complies with existing Web standards.

Regulators will also examine a new offer by Microsoft to guarantee that the technical information it shares with developers who make Windows-

compatible programs is accurate and complete. The information-sharing and warranty proposal aims to settle a lengthy antitrust row that has racked up nearly euro1.7 million (\$2.42 million) in EU fines for Microsoft.

Smith said this involves "significant change by Microsoft" and was based on long talks with EU regulators.

"We believe that if ultimately accepted, this proposal will fully address the European competition law issues relating to the inclusion of [Internet Explorer](#) in [Windows](#) and interoperability with our high-volume products," he said.

On The Net:

[Microsoft](#) proposal

<http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/press/2009/jul09/07-24statement.mspx>

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