

UK court rejects suit on Google search results

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(AP) -- A British judge has ruled that Google cannot be held responsible for defamatory words that appear in results on the popular Internet search engine.

Justice David Eady said that Google is not a publisher because searches are carried out entirely by computers and the [search engine](#) does not choose the terms itself.

The case was closely watched because the United Kingdom is perceived as having particularly stringent libel laws.

The ruling came in a suit by Metropolitan International Schools Limited, a British company which offers distance learning courses and trades under the brands of SkillsTrain or Train2Game, and previously as Scheidegger MIS.

MIS sued both Google UK Ltd. and the parent company, Google Inc., and Designtechnica Corp., incorporated in Oregon. The company's [Web site](#) hosts bulletin boards and forums that have carried allegedly defamatory complaints about Metropolitan International Schools.

Google cannot be "regarded as a publisher" for what its searches discover on the Web, the judge said in his ruling handed down Thursday, noting that Google had prevailed against similar suits in the Netherlands two years ago, and this year in cases in Spain and France.

MIS had won a lower court order that Designtechnica and Google should answer the suit in London, but that was thrown out by Eady. The plaintiffs have "no reasonable prospect of success," he said.

"When a snippet is thrown up on the user's screen in response to his search, it points him in the direction of an entry somewhere on the Web that corresponds, to a greater or lesser extent, to the [search terms](#) he has typed in," Eady said. "It is for him to access or not, as he chooses."

[Google](#) Inc. said in a statement that the verdict reinforces the principle that search engines are not responsible for content that is published on third party Web sites.

The judge "made clear that if someone feels they have been defamed by material on a Web site then they should address their complaint to the person who actually wrote and published the material, and not a [search engine](#), which simply provides a searchable index of content on the Internet," it said.

Judgment, <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/QB/2009/1765.html>

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