

Google defends local search results

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"We built Google for users, not websites," Google director of product management Carter Maslan said in a blog post.

"If we fail our users, competition is just a click away."

He said that Google welcomes viewpoints from website operators, but that the company's priority is to swiftly get users to the information they seek.

"When someone searches for a place on Google, we still provide the usual web results linking to great sites," Maslan continued.

"We simply organize those results around places to make it much faster to find what you're looking for."

Earlier this year, Google added a "Place Search" feature that organizes results around specified locations to help users find photos, reviews and facts.

"We've heard from users and businesses that Place pages are a great way to find local information and reach customers," Maslan said.

"We've also heard from webmasters that Place pages help them reach a broader audience when users click through to learn more."

Google has specialized search services that compete with websites devoted to topics such as travel, health, or local merchants.

The Journal cited executives from TripAdvisor.com, WebMD.com and other websites as accusing Google of giving its properties priority placement in searches.

Europe launched a full-frontal attack on Google in November; formally opening an [antitrust probe](#) after rivals there accused the [Silicon Valley](#) giant of rigging the online [search market](#).

European Union competition watchdogs announced an investigation after smaller companies accused Google of "unfavorable treatment" of their services in both unpaid and sponsored [search results](#), the crucial listings that make the web navigable.

Competition authorities are also probing whether Google's own services

-- including YouTube video, book-scanning project or telephony -- are getting "preferential placement" when users punch in search queries, some of which may lead to consumer spending.

The commission wants to check if [Google](#) was "lowering the ranking of unpaid search results" and examine other allegations of advertising interference including the imposition of exclusivity clauses, restricting ads from competing providers and data on consumer impact.

The company has stood behind its formula for serving search results and said it would cooperate with the probe.

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