

US may challenge Google's ITA buy: WSJ

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The newspaper, citing "people familiar with the matter," said that Justice Department lawyers have begun preparing legal documents for use in a possible court challenge to the ITA deal, but no decision to proceed has been made.

It said federal antitrust lawyers have been examining whether acquiring ITA, which powers many of the Web's most popular travel sites, would give the Internet search giant too much sway over the online travel

industry.

The Journal said the government is expected to decide later this month or early next month whether it will seek to block the deal, which was announced in July of last year.

A group of online travel firms has urged the US authorities to block the deal, saying it would give [Google](#) too much control over the lucrative sector.

"Acquiring ITA Software would give Google control over the software that powers most of its closest rivals in travel search and could enable Google to manipulate and dominate the online air travel marketplace," they said.

Members of the "FairSearch.org" coalition include Expedia and its brands Expedia.com, Hotwire and TripAdvisor, Farelogix Inc.; Kayak and its brand SideStep; and Sabre Holdings and its Travelocity brand.

ITA, a 500-person firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, specializes in organizing airline data, including flight times, availability and prices.

Its QPX flight data organization tool uses algorithms to combine flight information from airlines, including pricing and availability, to create a searchable database.

QPX software is used by online travel agencies and airlines. Microsoft's Bing search engine, Kayak, Orbitz and [TripAdvisor](#) are also ITA customers.

Andrew Silverman, a Google senior product manager, has dismissed the claims made by FairSearch.org, noting that the three most popular US travel sites -- Expedia, Priceline and Travelocity -- use data provided by

ITA's competitors.

Silverman also noted that Google does not plan to sell airline tickets directly and said it will honor all of ITA's existing agreements.

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