

EU probe seeks comments on Google search remedies

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This January 11, 2011 file photo screen image shows the Google logo in Washington, DC. The European Commission invited public comments Thursday on remedies submitted by US Internet giant Google to resolve EU concerns over its dominant position in the online search and advertising market.

The European Commission invited public comments Thursday on remedies submitted by US Internet giant Google to resolve EU concerns over its dominant position in the online search and advertising market.

The Commission, the EU's executive arm, said it would take the comments into account in its own review of Google's proposals and could make them binding on the company.

In a statement the Commission detailed four areas of concern, firstly that a [search](#) on Google will favour results linked to its own specialised services, such as surveys of restaurants or hotels.

Google was also using "without consent" original content from third party websites and obliging such sites to "obtain all or most of their online search advertisements" from the company, it added, essentially making Google the middle man between websites and advertisers.

Finally, Google was placing "contractual restrictions on the transferability of online [search advertising](#) campaigns," the Commission said.

Combined, "these practices could harm consumers by reducing choice and stifling innovation in the fields of specialised search services and online search advertising," the Commission said.

To remedy these concerns, Google had proposed for a period of five years to make users clearly aware if they were being directed to another Google service it said.

Google would also offer "all websites the option to opt-out from the use of all their content in Google's specialised search services," meaning they can restrict the company's access to their data and offerings.

Crucially, it would provide newspaper publishers with a mechanism to control the "display of their content in Google News," the Commission said

The company committed to "no longer include in its agreements with publishers any written or unwritten obligations that would require them to source online search advertisements exclusively from Google."

It would also "no longer impose obligations that would prevent advertisers from managing search advertising campaigns across competing advertising platforms."

Brussels launched its investigation of Google in November 2010 following a complaint by several companies, including US software giant Microsoft.

The US Federal Trade Commission recently dropped a similar investigation, saying it lacked a legal basis to bring a case against Google.

Critics say Google dominates the Internet search market and the [advertising](#) that goes along with it, with the Commission putting its share in the European Economic Area at 90 percent.

The search probe is one of a series of regulatory problems facing Google.

Earlier this month, a group of major companies, including Microsoft and Oracle, recently complained to the [European Commission](#) over Google's offerings for its Android-powered mobile phones.

Six European countries, including France and Britain, have also launched joint action against [Google](#) to get it to scale back new monitoring powers that watchdogs believe violate EU privacy protection rules.

The public has one month to submit comments. A company found at fault in an EU anti-trust probe can face fines of up to 10 percent of its

total annual sales.

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