

05/02/2014

Google/EU antitrust settlement

Following today's announcement of a settlement between the European Commission's competition authorities and Google in the investigation into potential abuse of a dominant market position, Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation, commented:

"The Commission has today fallen far short of the aim of ensuring fair consumer choice in relation to online search in Europe. Consumers should be able to expect neutral search results. This is not a reality today due the nature of Google's business model and we expected the Commission to remedy this.

"After several years of work, this is a deeply disappointing conclusion to the process. It would appear to have tripped over itself in a rush to a summer political deadline.

"The settlement has been concluded largely behind closed doors and we are disheartened to hear today that the EU will not seek feedback from parties formally interested in the investigation. Only notice of the deal will be served. Consumers being the Davids to the Google Goliath, their views could have been listened to much more closely by the antitrust investigators.

"Of particular, but not the only concern, is how price comparison search results will be presented. This extremely common user activity will now have three product price options presented alongside those preferred by Google. What is not being trumpeted is that these prime positions on the price comparison results page are decided via a qualified auction. Such a set-up will most likely operate in favour of those with the largest commercial clout. It also provides Google with a second revenue stream beyond those who pay to be a 'preferred service'.

"The Commission has emerged from a legal maze and brought consumers into a room of smoke and mirrors. After 3 years, the stated destination of countering abuse of a dominant market position has not been reached."

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