

EU Fines Microsoft for Browser Non-Compliance

Written by Marco Attard
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The European Commission (EC) slaps Microsoft with a €561 million fine for violating terms of the 2009 commitment to give Windows users alternatives to Internet Explorer.



According to investigators Windows 7 Service Pack 1 lacked the browser choice screen from May 2011 to July 2012, meaning 15m Windows users did not get to see the choice during the period.

Microsoft acknowledges the screen was not displayed at the time, even if it had provided the screen from May 2010. The case is also cited as a reason why CEO Steve Ballmer got only half of his potential 2012 bonus.

Clearly using Microsoft as an example to others, EC antitrust enforcer Joaquín Almunia says "legally binding commitments reached in antitrust decisions play a very important role in our enforcement policy because they allow for rapid solutions to competition problems. Of course, such decisions require strict compliance. A failure to comply is a very serious infringement that must be sanctioned accordingly."

The fine is worth around 1% of 2012 Microsoft revenues and brings EU-imposed antitrust penalties on the company to a total of €2.24 billion, including the initial €899m fine for failing to obey orders to share data with competitors.

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Such fines are only exceeded by the €1.06bn sanction against Intel currently being challenged in EU courts.

According to the Financial Times, the fine is a blow against Microsoft from Google-- reportedly the search giant, together with Opera, pointed out the issue to the EC. However such a victory might bite Google back, seeing it is too in the later stage of EU settlement negotiations.

Opera says it is "happy to see that the Commission is enforcing compliance with the commitment, which is critical to ensuring a genuine choice among web browsers for consumers." Google, on the other hand, remains silent.

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