

Apple exec defends the decision to make Google its default search engine on iPhones and Macs

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A cursor moves over Google's search engine page, Aug. 28, 2018, in Portland, Ore. On Tuesday, Sept. 26, 2023, a top Apple executive defended the tech giant's decision to make Google the default search engine on Apple iPhones and Macs, saying there was no "valid alternative." Credit: AP Photo/Don Ryan, File

A top Apple executive defended the tech giant's decision to make Google the default search engine on Apple iPhones and Macs, saying there was no "valid alternative."

Testifying in the biggest antitrust trial in a quarter century, Eddy Cue, Apple's senior vice president of services, said Tuesday that there wasn't "anybody as good" as Google at helping phone and computer users search the internet.

The U.S. Department of Justice has accused Google—a company whose very name is synonymous with scouring the web—of smothering competition by paying Apple, Verizon and other tech companies to make its search engine the first users see when they open their devices.

Google counters that it dominates the market because its search engine is better than the competition, a position Cue supported in his testimony. Google also argues that users can, in any event, switch to other search engines with a couple of clicks.

The antitrust case, the biggest since the Justice Department went after Microsoft and its dominance of internet browsers 25 years ago, was filed in 2020 during the Trump administration. The trial began Sept. 12 in U.S. District Court in Washington D.C.

Mikhail Parakhin, Microsoft's head of advertising and web services, testified Tuesday that Google's dominance feeds on itself. The more searches Google processes, the more data it collects that can be used to improve future searches.



The iPhone 15 phones are shown during an announcement of new products on the Apple campus in Cupertino, Calif., Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2023. On Tuesday, Sept. 26, a top Apple executive defended the tech giant's decision to make Google the default search engine on Apple iPhones and Macs, saying there was no "valid alternative." Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File

"The more data you have, the better the results are," he said, echoing one of the government's arguments.

Dominating the market helps in other ways, Parakhin said. For example, restaurants are more likely to make sure their location and hours are accurate in results on the leading search engine, while they are far less likely to bother correcting information on smaller search engines.

Experience shows, he said, that search engines need 20% market share to survive. Otherwise, "their quality degrades rapidly, and they disappear."

Parakhin also recounted his experience battling Google in his previous job as chief technology officer at the Russian search engine Yandex. After Russian regulators required Android phones to let users choose their search engine—instead of letting Google hold the default position—Yandex's market share rose from 30% to 55%, he said.

Earlier in the proceedings, the government called a behavioral economist, who testified that Google's default status discourages users from switching search engines, partly because they are reluctant to change ingrained habits. Last week, the founder of the search engine DuckDuckGo, which has about 2.5% of the search market, testified that his company struggled to compete because of Google's revenue-sharing agreements with Apple and other companies.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta likely won't issue a ruling until early next year. If he decides Google broke the law, another trial will determine how to rein in its market power. The Mountain View, California-based company could be stopped from paying Apple and other companies to make Google the default search engine.

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