Even those of us who Google every day—and that's the vast majority of us—can and should applaud this week's federal court ruling holding that
the company is maintaining its dominance in internet search through an illegal monopoly. Google search can simultaneously be a very, very useful product (indeed, the judge said it is "widely recognized as the best" general search engine "available in the United States") and one that might not stay in the digital catbird seat if it weren't strong-arming competitors.

D.C. Federal Judge Amit Mehta's ruling is rooted in the fact that Google spends billions of dollars to have its search engine installed as the default on new smartphones and other devices. In just one recent year alone, those agreements cost the company $26 billion—far more than most competitors can possibly afford.

While users certainly have a choice to go into their settings and change the default search engine to Bing (7% market share in the U.S.) or DuckDuckGo (2% market share), Google—with 90% market share overall and even higher than that on mobile devices—knows it's a big deal to be the automatic option for millions. If it weren't, they wouldn't pay anything near that sum.

When users reflexively rely on Google, every click that follows further cements Google's dominance in advertising—which in this case the judge said enabled monopolistic pricing—and a wide range of other realms. It's the key that unlocks the door to making money online.

The judicial-ordered remedy is still to be determined; the legal process to arrive at that will begin next month. This could include penalties or structural changes that weaken the company's ability or outright prevent it from setting Google as the default.

Also to be determined is whether the ruling and remedies will stand once the logic of the decision is subjected to the scrutiny of higher courts. There will be appeals—Google has a very well-funded legal department,
as does the U.S. Department of Justice and state attorneys general who brought the case. They're both hunkering down for the long haul. This was already looking like an unsettled moment for internet search engines. A new generation of AI-enabled tools including Perplexity AI, OpenAI's SearchGPT and Bing are jockeying with Google's new AI-enabled search to do more than just deliver a list of hits to queries.

These programs take an increasingly massive and confusing internet and distill it so that users can increasingly get everything they need without leaving the page where they entered their query. That's going to wind up giving Google, or whatever relative upstart makes inroads against it, even more power and moneymaking ability than before.

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