

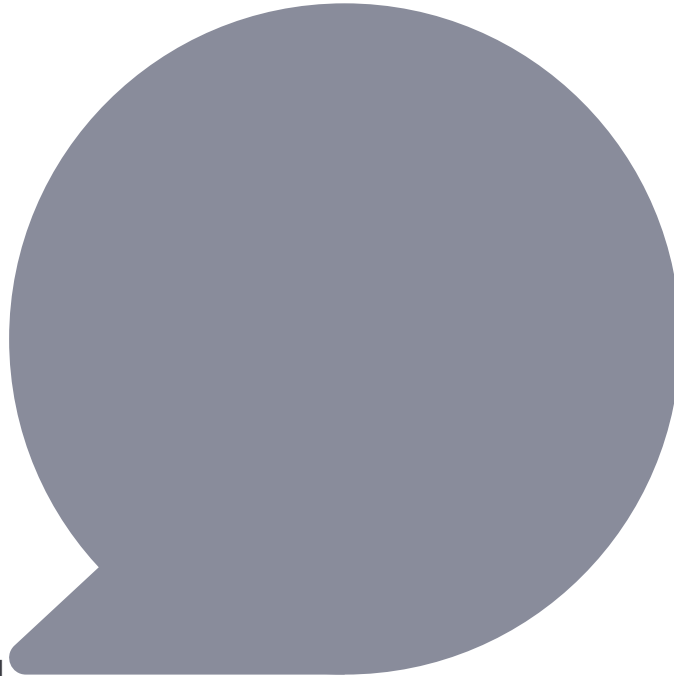
Report: DOJ wants to force Google Chrome sale, Android de-bundling



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Cutting off Google's control of the world's most popular browser may be necessary.

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Preferred by 61 percent of Internet users, Google's Chrome browser plays too big a role in maintaining the tech giant's search monopoly, the US Department of Justice has reportedly decided.

On Monday, people familiar with the matter told Bloomberg that top antitrust officials are planning to ask the court on Wednesday to order Google to sell off Chrome. In addition to banning Google's exclusive default deals, cutting off Google's control of the world's most popular browser may be

necessary, sources suggested, to level the playing field for rivals.

Additionally, the DOJ intends to ask for a range of other remedies, Bloomberg reported, all of them discussed in a court filing last month. These include imposing data licensing requirements and requiring more transparency for advertisers on where their ads appear, as well as requiring "measures related to artificial intelligence and its Android smartphone operating system," sources said. Those measures will likely stop Google from hoarding user data for both search results and AI products, with the DOJ seemingly paving the way for more users to opt their content out of AI training.

Notably, the DOJ will reportedly not push for Google to sell off Android, sources said, which was considered "a more severe option." Instead, the DOJ apparently wants Google to "uncouple its Android smartphone operating system from its other products, including search and its Google Play mobile app store, which are now sold as a bundle," sources said.

Google still plans to appeal the ruling, hoping to avoid massive changes to its core business. The search company's vice president of regulatory affairs, Lee-Anne Mulholland, told Bloomberg that the DOJ "continues to push a radical agenda that goes far beyond the legal issues in this case." She warned that "the government putting its thumb on the scale in these ways would harm consumers, developers and American technological leadership at precisely the moment it is most needed."

It's possible that the DOJ will seek an order requiring Chrome to be spun off but won't actually ever pursue that remedy. Sources told Bloomberg that the DOJ may reserve that "option" to be used only if other non-structural remedies fail.

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The strategy could help the DOJ succeed in its appeal, depending on how the court views the recommended breakup. In a statement, Adam Kovacevich, the founder and CEO of a trade group representing Google and other Big Tech companies called Chamber of Progress, noted that the DOJ could risk losing the appeal if the court finds the recommended remedies are too "broad." That's what happened in the Microsoft case in 2001, Kovacevich said, while accusing DOJ's antitrust chief Jonathan Kanter of being driven to demand broad remedies by his "ego."

"Kanter's fantastical remedies like Chrome divestiture and AI opt-outs have no connection to the Justice Department's original case, and requiring Google to share data with rivals will only make Google search worse for consumers,"

Kovacevich said, predicting the proposed remedies won't "hold up in court."

Trump could interfere with Chrome sale

Sources told Bloomberg that the DOJ's proposed remedies may change, as states are still mulling their own proposals. It's also possible that President-elect Donald Trump may interfere with the DOJ's proposed remedies; he said on the campaign trail that a Google break-up may not be desirable since it could "destroy" a company that the US highly values. The two-week hearing on remedies isn't scheduled until April, but the DOJ and states will make their official recommendations tomorrow, sources said.

Damian Rollison, a director of market insights for SOCI, an AI platform geared toward improving search results, told Ars he thinks that "the incoming administration is likely going to upend many of the DOJ's current plans, perhaps including its prosecutorial strategy in this case." But if Trump's "pro-business leanings" don't block the Chrome break-off, a DOJ win could "represent the first major strike against Google's market dominance in its 26-year history."

Rollison said that Google's biggest rivals, including makers of Safari, Firefox, Brave, DuckDuckGo, and Edge browsers, "would likely benefit from a market where Chrome is no longer propped up by membership in the Google family."

Author and tech journalist Cory Doctorow warned on X (formerly Twitter) that users may not benefit from the DOJ's sweeping remedies—particularly criticizing the feds' plan to require Google to license click and query data. Instead of using "antitrust to democratize surveillance so that everyone can spy as efficiently as Google does," Doctorow suggested that Google's exceptionally large data pool—which many rivals testified is an insurmountable barrier to competition in search—should be deleted.

"Releasing Google's click and query data into the wild is a privacy Chernobyl in the waiting," Doctorow suggested. "The

secrets that we whisper to search engines have the power to destroy us a thousand times over."

A final ruling in the search monopoly trial is expected in August 2025.