

The People vs. Google - Deconstructing the Verdict



For decades, the verb "to Google" has been synonymous with searching the internet. But the U.S. government has argued that this dominance wasn't just the result of a better product, but of an illegal monopoly. After a historic trial, a federal judge has sided with the government, delivering a verdict that could fundamentally alter the digital landscape.

The Heart of the Lawsuit

The core of the Department of Justice's (DOJ) case against Google was surprisingly simple. Prosecutors argued that Google illegally maintained its monopoly in the search engine market through a series of exclusive, multi-billion-dollar contracts. The most significant of these were agreements that made Google the default search engine on the vast majority of smartphones (like Apple's iPhone) and web browsers (like Mozilla Firefox). The government contended that these deals effectively locked out competitors like DuckDuckGo and Bing, not because Google was superior, but because it was the default option that most users never bothered to change.

The Verdict Explained

In a landmark ruling, U.S. District Judge Amit P. Mehta found that Google had indeed violated antitrust laws to protect its search monopoly. The court's reasoning focused squarely on the anticompetitive effects of these default-setting agreements. Judge Mehta determined that by paying massive sums to be the pre-selected search engine, Google denied rivals the scale and data necessary to compete meaningfully. This conduct, he concluded, harmed both innovation and consumer choice.

The Unexpected Player: Generative AI's Role

A fascinating variable in the trial was the rise of generative AI. Early in the proceedings, Google's defense team argued that new technologies like ChatGPT and Perplexity AI were a significant competitive threat, proving the search market was far from stagnant. However, AI's role became even more crucial in the final "remedies" phase of the trial. Judge Mehta cited the emergence of generative AI as one of the key reasons he did not order extreme measures, such as the sale of Google's Chrome browser. He determined that AI-powered search tools now present a genuine alternative to Google Search, fundamentally changing the competitive landscape. In other words, while the rise of AI didn't excuse Google's past monopolistic behavior, it decisively influenced the severity of the penalty by factoring in the future of market competition.

What Happens Next?

Google lost the case but avoided the worst-case scenario. The court ruled that Google does not have to forcibly sell its Chrome browser or its Android operating system. This is considered a significant victory for Google, as it evades the most severe structural breakup the DOJ had requested.

Instead, the court ordered the following remedies:

- **Ban on Exclusive Contracts:** Google can no longer enter into exclusive agreements to make its search service the default. It can still pay partners like Apple, but the deals cannot include provisions that block competitors.
- **Data Sharing:** Google must share some of its search index and user interaction data with "qualified competitors" to help them improve their search quality and compete.

This verdict is a compromise that puts the brakes on Google's monopolistic practices without breaking up the company. While the industry expects the competitive field to become somewhat more level, some critics have called it a "slap on the wrist" that is insufficient to curb Google's market dominance. For consumers like us, it could mean having more opportunities to choose our search engine when setting up a new device—the beginning of a small change that could shift the balance of power on the internet.

Sources:

1. AP News. "Subdued decision in Google antitrust trial may help keep a monopoly in power." 3 Sept. 2025.
2. The Economic Times. "ETtech Explainer: Google vs US in search monopoly case." 4 Sept. 2025.
3. The Guardian. "'Slap on the wrist': critics decry weak penalties on Google after landmark monopoly trial." 3 Sept. 2025.
4. CNN "Google has an illegal monopoly on search, judge rules. Here's what's next." 6 Aug. 2024.