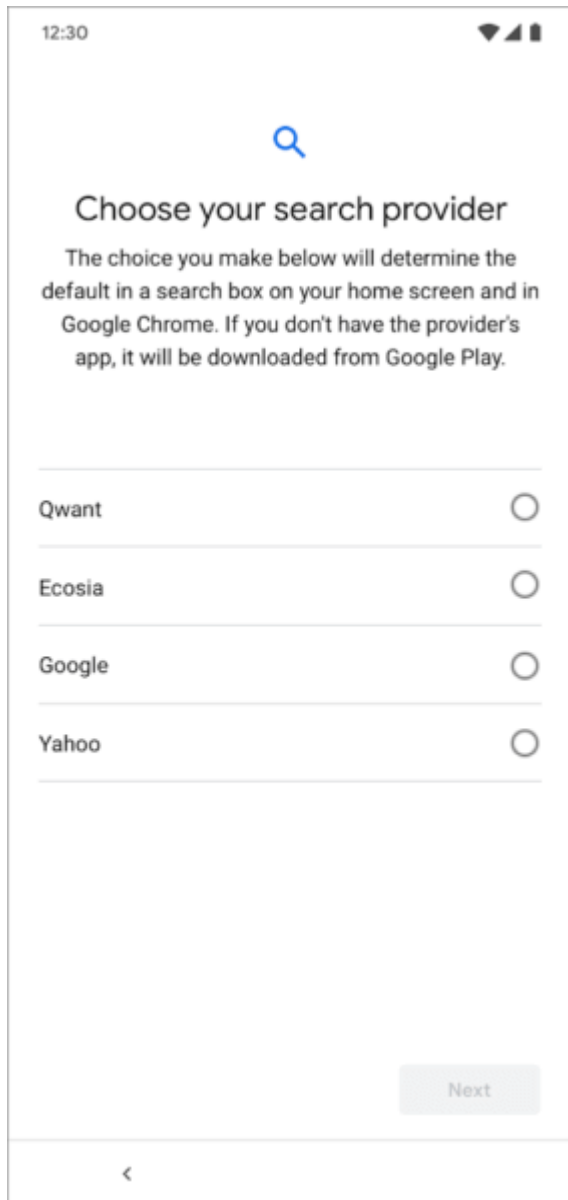


Google to offer mandated 'search choice' to EU Android users in 2020

Google is introducing a new search engine "choice screen" in Europe for Android users. It's reminiscent of what Microsoft was compelled to do roughly a decade ago, to offer "browser choice" on the desktop in Europe.

Part of antitrust compliance. This comes as part of Google's effort to comply with the European Commission's (EC's) July, 2018 antitrust decision involving Android and app bundling. Google has appealed the decision and the associated roughly \$5 billion fine.

Starting in 2020, when Android users set up their devices they'll be presented with a version of the following screen. Google says providers will potentially vary by country.



Default in Chrome and on the home screen. When a user makes their choice, the provider will become the default search engine:

- In Chrome (if the browser is installed)
- On the home screen search box
- The search app of that provider will also be installed (if not already)

The criteria for consideration include: being a general (and not vertical) search provider, support for the local language, and free availability in Google Play. Search providers will need to apply to Google by September 13. And by October 31, the list of search engines for each country will be confirmed.

Beyond the application, Google will conduct an auction to determine which engines are included on the choice screen. Successful bidders will be presented at random and “pay each time a user selects them from the choice screen in the given country.”

Here’s how the process will work according to Google:

In each country auction, search providers will state the price that they are willing to pay each time a user selects them from the choice screen in the given country. Each country will have a minimum bid threshold. The three highest bidders that meet or exceed the bid threshold for a given country will appear in the choice screen for that country.

Google says auction is fair and objective process. The idea of an auction has caused some critics to complain that Google is again “abusing its dominant position.” However, Google defended the auction as “a fair and objective method to determine which search providers are included in the choice screen. It allows search providers to decide what value they place on appearing in the choice screen and to bid accordingly.”

The CEO of Search Engine Ecosia, Christian Kroll, issued a statement in response to the news of the auction. “This is really disappointing news. Ecosia is a not-for-profit search engine – we use our revenue to plant trees in areas affected by deforestation or desertification, not to get into bidding wars,” he said. “If we choose to enter an auction and pay Google for the privilege of being a search engine option on Android, this will potentially be at the expense of millions of trees we could otherwise have planted.”

It’s also not entirely clear whether or how the auction process might co-exist with phone manufacturers’ (think: Samsung) control and discretion over their Android home screen real estate. This might negate their ability to charge

providers to be the default engine on those devices.

Why we should care. The European Commission may step in and prevent Google from charging rivals to participate in the search choice screen but that remains to be seen. Although Google is silent on this, it will appear as a choice in every country and is presumably not going to compete in the auction.

Because of its brand strength and existing usage, Google is likely to “win” in most cases unless rival search engines aggressively market some differentiating feature (e.g, privacy). Thus it’s unlikely that Google’s mobile search reach or ad revenue will be impacted much, if at all, by this process.

About The Author



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