Google turns to regulators to make Apple open up iMessage

iMessage serves as “an important gateway between business users and their customers” and should be regulated as a “core” service under the EU’s new Digital Markets Act (DMA), said Google and a group of major European telcos in a letter sent to the European Commission, and seen by *The Financial Times*. Being designated as a “core platform service” would be significant for iMessage, as it could compel Apple to make it interoperable with other messaging services.

Google has been very vocal about its desire for Apple to adopt RCS, the cross-platform messaging standard pitched as the successor to SMS, with its #GetTheMessage campaign. “Apple’s iMessage lock-in is a documented strategy,” Google senior vice-president Hiroshi Lockheimer posted on X, then known as Twitter, last year. “Using peer pressure and bullying as a way to sell products is disingenuous for a company that has humanity and equity as a core part of its marketing. The standards exist today to fix this.”

Apple’s Messages app can already send cross-platform messages via SMS. But iMessage’s enhanced features like encryption and better quality photos and videos, is exclusive to Apple’s ecosystem. Apple iMessage users communicate with feature-rich blue bubbles, while everyone else is relegated to a lowly green.

“An important gateway between business users and their customers”

The letter, which the *FT* notes was signed by an unnamed Google senior vice-president along with the CEOs of Vodafone,

Deutsche Telekom, Telefónica, and Orange, argues that iMessage meets the threshold for being a core platform service under the Digital Markets Act. Namely, that it's being operated by a company with annual revenues of over €7.5 billion, and at least 10,000 monthly active business users in the EU. The focus on business users reflects the fact that "gatekeepers" and their core platform services are deemed to "provide an important gateway between businesses and consumers" under the DMA.

"Through iMessage, business users are only able to send enriched messages to iOS users and must rely on traditional SMS for all the other end users," the letter, which was sent to internal market commissioner Thierry Breton, reportedly reads. iMessage is an important gateway between businesses and their customers, and this is "without doubt justification for Apple's designation as gatekeeper for its iMessage service," the letter argues.

Apple did not immediately respond to *The Verge's* request for comment. The company pointed *The Financial Times* towards a statement that says "consumers today have access to a wide variety of messaging apps, and often use many at once, which reflects how easy it is to switch between them."

"iMessage is designed and marketed for personal consumer communications, and we look forward to explaining to the commission why iMessage is outside the scope of the DMA," the statement continues. According to the Commission, Apple has previously argued that iMessage isn't popular enough in the EU to warrant being designated as a core platform service, and that it lacks support for business-focused features like APIs.

The Commission's investigation into whether iMessage should be designated a core platform service under the DMA is ongoing. A decision is expected before February next year.

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