Microsoft reportedly pitched Apple on buying Bing to no avail

Executives from Microsoft and Apple met in 2020 to discuss a possible sale of Bing, according to a new report from *Bloomberg*. But the talks failed to progress beyond the exploratory phase, indicating that Apple's top brass – including Eddy Cue, who was involved in the meetings – never seriously pursued the idea.

Testimony in the ongoing FTC antitrust suit against Google has made clear that Apple has never given much thought to replacing the leading search engine as the default on iPhones. Rather, Microsoft believes Apple has only raised the possibility to extract more money from Google to retain its spot. "It is no secret that Apple is making more money on Bing existing than Bing does,'' Microsoft's Mikhail Parakhin said Wednesday in US District Court.

Bloomberg's latest report confirms that the lucrative arrangement between Apple and Google was a key reason for keeping things as they were. But Apple is said to have "had concerns about Bing's ability to compete with Google in quality and capabilities." That jibes with Cue's testimony – he said "there wasn't a valid alternative to Google at the time" of the deal's origin and that an equal has yet to emerge in the many years since.

Apple is believed to take in upwards of $20 billion annually as part of the arrangement that secures Google's position as the default search engine on iOS and iPadOS. Last week, the CEO of DuckDuckGo, a privacy-focused search product, claimed

that it “takes too many steps” to switch the iPhone’s default. In reality, it’s fairly trivial and requires just a few taps in the settings menu — but this goes to show how rarely most consumers ever deviate from the default.

None of this is to say that Bing hasn’t had its chances: as *Bloomberg’s* Mark Gurman notes, Microsoft’s engine was the default for Siri and Spotlight searches for several years, starting with iOS 7. Some saw this as a prelude to a larger shift, but Apple never went all the way: Safari always kept the status quo and the Google search results that customers expected. There were meetings circa 2016 between chief executives Tim Cook and Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella on a potential new deal that would have led to monumental change, but it never panned out.

Apple and Google most recently extended their deal in 2021, so Microsoft’s pitch the year before was likely an attempt to throw a wrench into those renewal plans. So much for that.

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