

Report: Google's money was "key" factor in Apple rejecting Bing purchase

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A few years before Microsoft went all-in on a ChatGPT-powered Bing search engine, the company had another idea for its perennial, also-ran search engine: sell it to Apple.

A report in Bloomberg, sourced from people familiar with the early theoretical sales talks, states that Microsoft pitched Bing as a way for Apple to replace Google as the default search provider on iPhones, MacBooks, and other devices.

The deal didn't make it past the conversation stage, according to Bloomberg. Microsoft executives approached Eddy Cue, Apple's senior vice president of services, who brokered Apple's deal with Google—purportedly worth between \$4 and \$7 billion in 2020—for Google's long-standing default placement. Google's paid presence on Apple devices has been reviewed in court recently as part of the Department of Justice's antitrust trial over Google's search business.

Cue said in court earlier this week that he didn't think "at the time, or today, that there was anybody out there who is anywhere near as good as Google at searching," and clarifying that there wasn't "a valid alternative."

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There was also a lot of money involved, a “key reason” the talks didn’t make it past a Cue conversation, according to Bloomberg, though “quality and capabilities” were involved, too.

Microsoft had considered outspending Google to overcome that key barrier. Microsoft executive Jon Tinter testified Thursday that Microsoft considered making a large investment in Apple in 2016 toward the goal of making Bing the default search engine on Apple devices. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and Apple CEO Tim Cook met during those discussions, according to Tinter. Tinter said that Microsoft ultimately would have lost money on the investment but had considered it as part of an effort to grow market share for Bing.

It’s almost certain that Bing would have undergone a complete rebrand and redesign if acquired by Apple and may have been subsumed into other services, such as Siri. It’s also unlikely Apple would have made a public launch of AI-powered answers in Bing the way that Microsoft has seen fit, with prominent advisories about its early-stage nature.

Then again, it’s hard to imagine any part of Bing being part of the Apple ecosystem because the company doesn’t seem interested in taking it on, even when a lot of money is offered.

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