

Sundar Pichai says DOJ demands are a “de facto” spin-off of Google search

The Department of Justice (DOJ) rested its case in Google's search remedy trial earlier this week, giving Google a chance to push back on the government's attempt to break up the search giant. Today is arguably Google's best chance to make the case that it should not be harshly penalized in the ongoing search antitrust case, with CEO Sundar Pichai taking the stand.

Pichai attempted to explain why Google isn't abusing its market position and why the DOJ's proposed remedies are too extreme. The issue of Chrome divestment came up, but Google's team also focused intensely on the potential effects of the DOJ's data remedies, which could force Google to share its search index and technology with other firms.

A de facto spin-off

Pichai, who chose to stand while giving testimony, took issue with the government's proposal to force Google to license search technology to other companies. The DOJ claims that Google's status as a monopolist has resulted in it accumulating a huge volume of user data on search behavior. Plus, its significant technological lead means its index of the web is much more robust than competing services.

If the market is going to be rebalanced, the DOJ believes Google must be forced to license this data. Google has derisively referred to this as “white labeling” Google search.

According to Bloomberg, Pichai used even harsher language when discussing these remedies in court. He called this part of the government's case "so far reaching, so extraordinary" that it would remake Google as a company and lead to numerous unintended consequences. To hear Pichai tell it, forcing Google to license this data for a nominal fee would be a "de facto divestiture of search."

Giving other companies the option of using Google search index to map the web would make other products better, but Pichai claims they would essentially be able to reverse-engineer everything that makes Google's platform special. And at that point, Google would need to reevaluate how it approaches innovation. Pichai suggests the data remedies could make it "unviable" for Google to invest in research and development as it has been for the past 20 years.

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