It’s official: EU will force Google to share search data and open up AI on Android

The EU’s mandates for Google Search could have more wide-ranging implications. Google will be forced to share search data with competing search providers, giving them a better chance of gaining market share and loosening Google’s iron grip on web search. The Commission alleges this action was necessary because Google’s past sharing offers have not gone far enough.

Under the new rules, Google will have to provide data to other search firms transparently and for a reasonable fee. Google will also have to treat AI chatbots as search services for the purposes of data sharing. The goal is for other companies to get access to search metrics similar to what Google itself sees, which EU regulators claim is essential for a smaller player to challenge Google’s dominance.

Google calls for “balance”

Google was vocally opposed to the EU’s new rules before they were finalized, and the company is not mincing words now that they’re final. Kent Walker, Google’s president of global affairs, claims Google offered more measured solutions that it believed could satisfy the DMA’s goals, but the path chosen by the European Commission goes too far and will harm users.

“Today’s decisions risk undermining vital privacy and security guardrails for millions of Europeans,” said Walker.

Walker objects to the Commission’s position that AI assistants

need greater access to Android. He claims that AI tools are widely supported, with phone makers playing a key role in vetting them. Granting non-Gemini AI platforms deeper integration with Android could circumvent safeguards, he said.

Similarly, Google contends that sharing search data as the EU now demands will risk user privacy. The DMA action calls on Google to anonymize data using a multilayered approach, and the Commission is open to amending its decision to ensure identifiable data is appropriately handled. Google acknowledges that regulators are open to adjusting the rules, but Walker still characterizes this ruling as a threat to privacy, business trade secrets, and even national security.

Google will have some time to hash out the specifics with EU regulators. The company must be ready to start sharing search data with other companies in January 2027. The Android platform must be updated for deeper integration with AI apps by July 2027.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/its-official-eu-will-force-google-to-share-search-data-and-open-up-ai-on-android/

US military sent explosive drone boats into combat for the first time

For the first time in its history, the US military sent explosive-laden drone boats into combat by attacking an

Iranian midget submarine and naval port. The unprecedented use of such kamikaze sea drones by the United States comes nearly a decade after Iranian and Houthi forces first demonstrated such weapons.

The US military shared a video showing three “one-way attack surface drones” exploding after approaching an Iranian midget submarine and ship maintenance facility at Iran’s Bandar Abbas Naval Base on the night of July 12. US Central Command, the US military combat command responsible for Middle East operations, described the strikes in a social media post as the “first time American forces have employed sea drones in combat operations.”

The US drone boats were able to “make a low-speed, uncontested approach” to their targets before exploding, according to USNI News, a news service from the nonprofit US Naval Institute. USNI News also identified one of the targets as an Iranian Ghadir-class midget submarine that was out of the water while being suspended from a gantry.

[embedded content]

Kamikaze drone boat attack.

The technology behind the strikes involved Saronic Corsair autonomous surface vessels developed by Saronic Technologies, a defense company based in Austin, Texas. The company’s website describes the drone boat as being 24 feet in length and capable of carrying up to 1,000 pounds over 1,000 nautical miles at a top speed surpassing 34 knots.

Such Corsair drone boats supposedly have the capability to operate autonomously without direct human control, including long-range navigation and patrol missions along with regulating power consumption and engine use to loiter at a specific position, according to a Saronic blog post. They are designed to perform a wide variety of missions and were likely equipped with explosives for this specific strike.

This marks the second notable US military use of drone boats during the war, which began with the United States and Israel attacking Iran on February 28, 2026. The US military already used a Corsair sea drone to rescue two US Army helicopter pilots in the waters off the coast of Oman on June 8, after their US Army AH-64 Apache helicopter was taken down by a cheap Iranian Shahed drone.

https://arstechnica.com/ai/2026/07/us-military-sent-explosive-drone-boats-into-combat-for-the-first-time/

Aussie gov’t tells volunteers to throw out thousands of functioning test routers

Last week, thousands of SamKnows routers were bricked after a government program ran its course.

In 2020, as part of a program conducted by the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC), the Australian government’s chief competition regulator, thousands of volunteers received routers to help test and report on the typical speed and performance of broadband plans in Australia. (More specifically, the Measuring Broadband Australia (MBA) program targeted fixed-line broadband services provided over the NBN, Australia’s government-owned wholesale open-access broadband network, as well as services delivered over other access networks.)

According to the final report that the ACCC distributed, the routers are whiteboxes that were “supplied by SamKnows” and that “perform tests to measure internet performance using test servers maintained by SamKnows and hosted in Australia.”

Last month, the program concluded, and the ACCC released its final performance report (PDF). Subsequently, the routers used for the program were bricked after June 30.

Ars Technica reviewed a copy of an email that an MBA volunteer received in mid-June informing them that the program would end on June 30, 2026 and further stating:

> ***Service Termination:*** *Your whitebox will be disabled, and your SamKnows One account will be closed.*

The email, signed by “The SamKnows Team (part of Cisco),” noted that after June 30, the devices would stop collecting data and that users’ “measurement and registration data will be deleted in accordance with our retention obligations under our end-user license agreement.”

However, as one MBA volunteer pointed out to Ars via email, the routers are still working, making the decision to disable the devices an avoidable e-waste risk.

When asked by Ars, the ACCC didn’t specify the number of SamKnows routers disabled last month. However, in a report about the MBA program released in December 2020 (PDF), the ACCC said it initially expected to release about 4,000 whiteboxes throughout the program’s duration and had distributed “over 2,600″ by December 2020. The report noted that the ACCC retained an “adequate pool of whiteboxes to allow for the expansion of our reporting to cover, for example, emerging [retail service providers] and new speed tier plans.”

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/thousands-of-routers-b

ricked-after-government-program-concludes-in-australia/

TikTok users don’t have as much agency over their FYPs as they think

“We basically work from the assumption that if we want data, then we need to obtain it ourselves,” Sapiezynski said of their account cloning approach. “Even if we did, for example, want to use the official TikTok researcher API, none of the user agency is covered there. You can see what content is available, but you cannot see individual timelines that will tell you how the algorithm reacts to a particular user watching or not watching a particular video. Similarly, with the European Union’s researcher data access, all of this data can only be accessed aggregated and not from a perspective of a single user. So when you want to really study personalization, this research cannot be done on the aggregated data.”

Mind the gap

The team ran their experiments multiple times on the 90 cloned accounts and made side-by-side comparisons, using both implicit and explicit signals, to see how TikTok’s algorithm responded in terms of recommended content on the FYPs. They focused on three popular topics: cooking videos, fitness videos, and sports betting.

The “not interested” button proved most effective, reducing unwanted content by around 84 percent, compared to just a 48 percent reduction from merely skipping videos. “So if you don’t want to see something, you should be hitting that button,” said Kaplan. But the authors note that the “not interested” option seems to be deliberately hidden from users. And it was very easy for the algorithm to “relapse” into once again flooding an FYP with previously unwanted content; even a brief re-engagement by a user is sufficient.

“It turns out that it works in the beginning,” said Sapiezynski. “When you start saying, ‘I don’t want to see this particular topic,’ the platform might actually show you fewer of such pieces of content. But then the platform will slowly start putting it back in your feed. And if you don’t *continue* saying, ‘I really don’t want to see it,’ this may balloon back to the place where it was in the beginning. So the platform does react to your negative feedback, but then it also very much reacts to your express behavior. So if you are presented with this content again and you start watching it, the platform will again feed it to you more and more.”

In other words, be consistently very active with your feedback—constant vigilance!—when it comes to curating TikTok’s FYP. The researchers hope to test this hypothesis on real user data in the future. That said, “We can teach users how to use the platform better, but ultimately the way that you’re interfacing with the platform is going to be dictated by the design decisions that are fundamental to the platform,” said Kaplan.

Proceedings of the Twentieth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media, 2026. DOI: 10.1609/icwsm.v20i1.42688 (About DOIs).

https://arstechnica.com/science/2026/07/how-much-control-do-tiktok-users-really-have-over-fyps/

US seeks cheaper hunter-killer drones after Iran destroys $1B worth of Reapers

Unleashing the drones of war comes at a cost

A heavy reliance on Reapers avoids putting more US pilots at risk, but it has also led to Iranian air defenses shooting down dozens of the hunter-killer drones. The US military had lost nearly 30 Reaper drones as of May 2026, including some destroyed on the ground by Iranian counterstrikes, according to Air & Space Forces Magazine. The Air Force acknowledged such combat losses as reducing its Reaper fleet to about 135 drones.

The total US taxpayer bill for the destroyed Reapers comes to about $1 billion, according to Bloomberg. A typical Reaper may cost $30 million per aircraft, but the Air Force has said a Reaper equipped with a full sensor package can cost up to $50 million.

That number of Reapers lost in combat has almost certainly increased since May, as the United States and Iran have continued to trade airstrikes and drones despite so-called ceasefire periods and attempted negotiations. On July 8, as hostilities ramped up again recently with new Iranian strikes on commercial shipping triggering more US military airstrikes,

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps claimed to have shot down yet another Reaper drone.

The defense company General Atomics stopped manufacturing Reaper drones for the US military in 2025. But a General Atomics executive told Breaking Defense that the company is interested in pursuing the newest drone contract offering from the US military, and seemed to suggest it would provide a cheaper successor to the Reaper.

The Defense Innovation Unit notice called for drones capable of carrying many different sensor and weapons payloads up to 2,800 pounds and flying with a combat radius of at least 2,300 nautical miles—or 8,000 nautical miles on a one-way strike mission—while executing the same missions that the MQ-9A Reaper drone currently performs for the US military. It envisions delivery of “20 mission-ready aircraft” by 2031.

Whether the US military and companies can deliver on that vision of deploying cheaper yet capable strike drones remains to be seen. The Pentagon is asking for about $54 billion in its fiscal year 2027 budget to spend on drones and autonomous warfare technologies—an amount that rivals wartime Ukraine’s entire military budget.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/us-seeks-cheaper-hunter-killer-drones-after-iran-destroys-1b-worth-of-reapers/

Kremlin suspected of flying drones over Europe using

Russian shadow fleet

On September 28, 2025, French naval commandos made additional discoveries after boarding the *Boracay* off the French coast—possibly because of the ship's suspected link to the drone incidents over Denmark. The French commandos found that the ship had a Chinese captain but also happened to be carrying two Russians employed by the Moran Security Group, a Russian private military company founded by former Federal Security Service officers. One of the Russians also previously worked for Russia's Wagner Group private military company.

Interviews revealed that the Russians were charged with "gathering intelligence, protecting the vessel and ensuring the captain strictly adhered to Russian interests." That provided "direct evidence of a shadow-fleet vessel linked to Russian intelligence structures," according to the IISS report.

On March 30, 2026, a French court sentenced the Chinese captain in absentia to one year in prison and issued an arrest warrant after convicting him of failing to comply with orders to stop his ship. The court also ordered the captain to pay a $172,000 fine.

The European response

The full report goes into much more detail about the movements of individual shadow fleet vessels during various drone incidents. But the overall picture of the possible Russian drone campaign suggests that the European response has been fragmented and uncoordinated for the most part so far.

The European Union is working to develop a European Drone

Defence Initiative (EDDI) that would enable member countries to deploy interoperable counter-drone technologies for detecting, tracking, and shooting down or otherwise neutralizing drones. But the system is not expected to be fully functional until the end of 2027.

The IISS report also warns that “no amount of hardware will compensate for the absence of political authority to use it,” and suggests that European governments need to better coordinate to establish legal clarity around rules of engagement for drone incursions.

Then there is the “hardest” problem of maritime accountability, according to the IISS report. That will require European governments to be more willing to investigate and stop Russian-linked ships and shadow fleet vessels from loitering near European coasts while launching drones with “effective impunity.”

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/kremlin-suspected-of-flying-drones-over-europe-using-russian-shadow-fleet/

FAA proposal: Supersonic airliners can fly over US cities if they’re quiet

“I’m honestly surprised that the FAA would propose a rule this weak,” Rutherford told the publication.

US lawmakers in Congress have also been pushing forward the

Supersonic Aviation Modernization Act. That would require the FAA to allow for overland supersonic flights “so long as the aircraft is operated in such a manner that no sonic boom reaches the ground in the United States.” The bill passed the House on March 24, 2026, and is still awaiting a vote in the Senate.

Another way for quiet supersonic flight

Meanwhile, NASA has been testing a different approach to quieter supersonic flight with the Lockheed Martin X-59 Quesst—a needle-nosed experimental aircraft with an airframe designed to reduce the typical sonic boom to a sonic thump. NASA has relied on perceived levels of decibels (PldB) to evaluate sound levels, with the goal of consistently demonstrating sonic thumps around 75 PldB that would sound like a car door slamming about 20 feet away.

A NASA test pilot and mission integration manager previously told Ars that the X-59 aircraft’s future supersonic flight tests over US cities and towns nationwide would provide community feedback on perceived sound levels that could help inform regulations by civil aviation authorities.

The FAA still has time to further refine its proposed noise regulations for overland supersonic flights before attempting to finalize them by mid-2027. The agency also plans to propose another rule later this year that would set takeoff and landing noise standards for supersonic aircraft.

Legalization of quieter overland supersonic flights does not guarantee a successful comeback for commercial supersonic airliners. The Concorde supersonic airliner cut transatlantic flights between New York and London from seven hours to under three hours, but the aircraft’s massive fuel consumption made it difficult to sustain profitable operations—never mind

recovering the more than $2.8 billion in development costs shared by the UK and French governments.

Boom Supersonic is developing a supersonic airliner called Overture with the goal of delivering the first aircraft to customers by 2029. The company has signed commercial agreements with American Airlines, Japan Airlines, and United Airlines that give the companies options to purchase the Overture aircraft.

But Boom has also pivoted away from its main goal in recent months to produce natural gas turbines to power AI data centers. Boom CEO Blake Scholl has suggested that revenue from this side venture would help pay for the development costs of the Overture supersonic airline. At the same time, United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby has said he gives Boom a “50/50” chance of getting its supersonic airliner flying.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/faa-proposal-supersonic-airliners-can-fly-over-us-cities-if-theyre-quiet/

Plex debuts 5-year membership pass for $250

When Plex launched in 2012, it sold lifetime access to its media server software for $75. In 2014, Plex raised the price to be more sustainable for the company, it said, and for years, Lifetime Plex Passes cost $120. Even the pricier $250 rate, which Plex offered from March 2025 until yesterday, was a steal compared to what $250 buys you at Plex now: a five-

year subscription.

As first spotted by The Desk, Plex yesterday launched the five-year Plex Pass. It comes alongside Lifetime Pass prices increasing to $750 yesterday, a change that Plex announced in May and, in a blog post update this week, said: “reflects the real, ongoing value of the software and our commitment to building, improving, and supporting Plex for years to come.”

The stark change in what $250 can get you at Plex is indicative of the company’s financial goals. Plex hasn’t yet announced profitability and has raised $87.6 million over nine rounds of funding, per CB Insights. The company is looking to squeeze more money out of its users and price its media server business higher.

The higher Lifetime Pass pricing and new five-year pass also appear aimed at pushing users toward subscriptions. More recurring revenue can help Plex extract greater value from its customers over their lifetimes, make cash flow more predictable, please investors, help fund new features, and reduce Plex’s dependence on the fickle advertising market.

In May, Plex said it had “considered eliminating the Lifetime Plex Pass in the past, given that recurring subscriptions help us sustain long-term development.” One can’t help but wonder if this five-year pass could someday be the longest-term pass available to Plex’s media server customers.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/250-used-to-get-you-a-lifetime-plex-pass-now-you-get-a-five-year-subscription/

Google loses long-running appeal of record EU fine, will have to cough up $4.7 billion

Back in 2018, Google was handed a record-setting 4.34 billion-euro ($4.9 billion) fine in Europe for abusing its monopoly on Android. The company has spent the intervening years challenging that decision, but the continent's highest court has put a stop to that. The Court of Justice of the European Union has affirmed the penalty, meaning Google is out of options.

Google's fight may not have turned out the way the company wanted, but it wasn't for nothing. The initial amount was trimmed slightly by a lower court in 2022, bringing the total to a still record-setting 4.1 billion euros ($4.7 billion). And that looks like the amount Google will have to pay since there are no further avenues for appeal.

The fine stems from the way Google bundles apps and services with Android phones. The EU took issue with Google search and Chrome being the default options on Android. Even devices made by other companies, such as Samsung and Xiaomi, include Google apps as the default per the Android licensing agreement, giving Google an unfair advantage, according to European antitrust regulators. This is not to be confused with a 2.95 billion euro ($3.45 billion) fine against Google's advertising monopoly issued by the European Union last year.

"The appeal brought by Google and its parent company Alphabet against the judgment of the General Court is dismissed,

thereby confirming the penalty imposed for Google Search's abuse of a dominant position in the context of the Android operating system," the judge's ruling (PDF) said.

The case mirrored Europe's actions against Windows years earlier when Microsoft was forced to add browser ballot screens to crack Internet Explorer's dominance. Of course, Microsoft's browser dominance was crumbling by the time the EU managed to get that implemented. Google's market position, however, remains firmly in place despite creating similar ballot screens on Android when the ruling was first handed down.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/google-loses-long-running-appeal-of-record-eu-fine-will-have-to-cough-up-4-7-billion/

Reddit will require you to log in to use old.reddit.com

Reddit will start requiring people to be logged into Reddit to use old.reddit.com.

The new requirement will take effect "over the next month," a Reddit employee going by the username boat-botany announced on the social media platform today. The person claimed that the change is part of an ongoing effort to "tighten how automated systems access Reddit."

The Reddit employee wrote:

> *Old Reddit's logged-out experience is a significant source of abusive scraping and automated traffic on the platform. It's also an important interface for many long-time mods and Redditors. To strike the right balance between preserving your access to Old Reddit while preventing abusive scraping and automated traffic, over the next month we will start requiring everyone to log in.*

In a follow-up comment, boat-botany defined abusive behavior as that which violates Reddit's rule prohibiting activity that interferes with the platform's "normal use" or that "create[s] programs or applications" that break Reddit's (controversial) API rules.

"By logging in, we get a lot more signal that allows us to detect whether an account is breaking the rules, and then we can block that traffic or enforce those accounts," boat-botany said.

As of this writing, Ars was still able to use old.reddit.com without logging in.

The news is likely to upset some longtime Reddit users who have relied on old.reddit.com for a familiar look that they find easier to navigate and digest and who also want to view Reddit without logging in for convenience and/or privacy.

When a user asked boat-botany why New Reddit isn't scraped as often as Old Reddit, the Reddit employee pointed to a comment by another user.

"[T]he shape of malicious traffic is always changing," the user, Nestramutat, wrote. "It's going to be a constant cat and mouse game[.] As you ban one method, a new one gets developed. It's easy to see abusive traffic in hindsight, but it's harder to pre-emptively block it. Given that they're claiming Old Reddit doesn't have the modern security stack, this is likely proving to be an even greater challenge."

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/06/reddit-will-require-you-to-log-in-to-use-old-reddit-com/