Where are the iPhone’s WebKit-less browsers?

It’s been 16 months since a DMA ruling allowed iOS developers like Google and Mozilla to use their own browser engines in the EU, so… where are they? According to the Open Web Advocacy (OWA) — a nonprofit group of software engineers that advocates for the open web — Apple continues to place technical and financial restrictions on WebKit-alternative iOS browser engines that effectively stifle competition.

OWA says these barriers include insufficient testing tools outside of the US, hostile legal terms, and forcing browser developers to create entirely new apps to ship their own engines, causing developers to lose their existing European user base. Instead of allowing Google, for example, to simply update its existing Chrome browser with a Blink engine, Apple’s rules require a brand new app for the EU audience, resetting the user count to zero. Developers would then have to maintain two separate browser implementations.

Mozilla told *The Verge* last year that it was disappointed by Apple’s restrictions, describing them as “a burden” on independent browser providers. “Apple’s proposals fail to give consumers viable choices by making it as painful as possible for others to provide competitive alternatives to Safari,” said Mozilla spokesperson Damiano DeMonte. “This is another example of Apple creating barriers to prevent true browser competition on iOS.”

Apple added support for non-WebKit browsers in iOS 17.4 to appease DMA rules that aim to prevent tech giants from disadvantaging third-party browser engines, but the OWA alleges that Apple’s restrictions mean it is “not in effective

compliance with the DMA.”

“Ensuring other browsers are not able to compete fairly is critical to Apple’s best and easiest revenue stream,” the OWA says. The group notes that Safari brings in $20 billion per year in search engine revenue from Google, accounting for 14-16 percent of Apple’s annual operating profit, and that it’s set to lose $200 million per year for every 1 percent of browser market share that Safari loses.

Outside of the EU, Apple is also facing pressure from UK regulators to allow developers to use alternative browser engines in iOS, following an investigation that found both Apple and Google were “holding back” mobile browser innovation.

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