# U.S. DOJ trial against Google highlights AI's role in search monopoly case



The ongoing remedy phase of the U.S. Department of Justice's antitrust trial against Google has increasingly centred on the company’s involvement in artificial intelligence (AI), highlighting how this technology has rapidly evolved and intersected with the search engine market. Originally filed in 2020 on grounds of Google monopolising the search engine sector, the case now spotlights AI innovations as integral to Google’s market dominance and the government’s proposed remedies.

The trial, presided over by U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta, is examining potential penalties against Google following a verdict that found the company monopolises search through practices including exclusive agreements with device manufacturers like Apple and Samsung. These agreements preinstall Google as the default search engine on many devices, a factor the DOJ asserts has helped sustain Google's dominant market position.

A defining feature of the current trial is the attention given to Google's AI offerings, notably its Gemini chatbot, which draws on Google's extensive search index containing hundreds of billions of webpages. The Department of Justice (DOJ) argues that Google leverages user data generated through its search engine to bolster its AI products, thereby reinforcing its monopoly and creating barriers for competitors in both search and AI markets. David Dahlquist, acting deputy director of the DOJ's antitrust civil litigation division, stated in opening remarks that the court should adopt “forward-looking” remedies that address these emerging AI factors, noting, “This court's remedy should be forward-looking and not ignore what is on the horizon.”

Google’s search index—a vast, proprietary database—is pivotal for AI development because it provides the data necessary to train generative AI models capable of producing new content such as text, videos, or images from user prompts. The DOJ’s case included testimonies from executives of AI firms like OpenAI and Perplexity, who explained how Google’s control over this data hampers their efforts to develop competitive AI products. Nick Turley, OpenAI's product head for ChatGPT, testified about the challenges OpenAI faced in creating its own search index, describing it as costly, time-consuming, and years away from completion. He revealed that OpenAI attempted to partner with Google to access its search data, but Google declined, viewing OpenAI as a competitor.

Despite these claims, Google's representatives reject the monopoly allegations in AI, highlighting fierce competition from firms such as OpenAI, Meta, and Perplexity. John E. Schmidtlein, Google's lawyer, cited high user numbers for ChatGPT and MetaAI, arguing that these competitors lead the market in distribution and usage, with Gemini trailing behind. Internal company documents presented in court showed 35 million daily and 350 million monthly active Gemini users worldwide in March, an increase from 9 million daily users in October 2024, yet significantly less than ChatGPT’s 160 million daily active users.

The DOJ seeks broad remedies that would compel Google to license its search data, including user queries and click information, to other AI competitors on a paid basis, in addition to forcing Google to divest its Chrome browser, which is also implicated in maintaining the company's monopoly.

Perplexity’s chief business officer, Dmitry Shevelenko, testified about difficulties in securing deals with device makers and carriers due to Google’s dominant position, describing Google’s control as akin to a "mob boss." However, Google counters that Perplexity's substantial market valuation of over $9 billion demonstrates its viability without Google’s data.

The trial is expected to continue with testimonies on the feasibility of divesting Chrome and further arguments on the proposed remedies. Google plans to present its case next week, with CEO Sundar Pichai expected to testify, although a precise date is pending. Closing arguments are projected for the end of May, after which Judge Mehta will issue his decision. Google has indicated plans to appeal the underlying ruling following this remedy phase.

Observers note that the outcome of this trial phase will extend beyond search engines, potentially shaping the future landscape of AI development and competition.

This report is based on information from NPR and additional context from publicly available sources.

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