

Opinion

These 'Remedies' for Google Would Hurt My Healthy-Habits Business

Proposed sanctions in two antitrust cases could cause chaos for mobile apps.



Art by Clark Miller



By Sean Higgins

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In 2018—after I forgot to call my mom one too many times—a friend and I launched an app that nudges people to take life-enhancing steps such as connecting with family, exercising more and learning new skills. Today we have nearly 40,000 subscribers. Businesses and organizations across the country use our app to improve employees’ health and well-being.

We’re proud of the business we’ve built. But we couldn’t have succeeded without Google’s and Apple’s world-class software distribution systems, which allow millions of people to visit the companies’ trusted online app stores, find high-quality apps and securely install them.

The Takeaway

- Separating Android from Google could lead to more technical glitches and security breaches
- Forcing Google to distribute other app stores would confuse customers
- Developers would have less access to analytics on our users

More than half our customers use Android-powered devices, which is why I’m worried by recent proposals to dismantle—or seriously disrupt—Google’s system. I don’t think the government officials offering the proposals understand the harm they would cause to small businesses like mine.

In August, a federal judge said Google unfairly dominates the search market by paying phone manufacturers to make Google their default search engine. I’m not a lawyer, so I don’t have an opinion on the ruling. But as an app developer, I feel strongly about one of the Justice Department’s proposed “remedies” for Google’s conduct: separating Android from Google.

Android is Google’s operating system for mobile phones and other smart devices. It’s also an open-source platform, meaning developers can use it at no cost to create apps that work on the world’s 2.5 billion Android-powered devices.

Google maintains and updates Android to ensure apps work properly and securely on users' devices. An independent Android wouldn't have Google's resources and expertise. That means businesses like mine, our customers and 133 million Americans with Android-powered devices would likely experience far more technical problems and security breaches.

That's only the start of my worries. In October, the judge in a separate case against Google brought by Epic Games ordered Google to distribute other app stores as it would any app in the Play store. That's a formula for confusing customers and making them vulnerable to fraud. People trust that apps associated with Google will meet its high standards for security and functionality. If Google Play has to distribute other app stores, customers could easily download a bad app they *thought* was Google-approved—but it wasn't. Degrading consumer trust in the Play store would be incredibly damaging to Android developers.

The judge in the Epic Games case also ordered Google to make all the apps in the Play store available to other app stores. That could weaken one of the Play store's strengths: its free analytics. Developers can see a variety of metrics—like how users find our app—that help us understand and effectively market to our users. If our app were suddenly available in a dozen app stores, we'd have a hard time gathering those analytics—if the new stores even provided them. The other stores also might charge us for access to analytic data.

Taken together, these two lawsuits could cause enough chaos in the mobile app ecosystem to sink my team's business and thousands of others.

The proposed remedies in the two cases could result in a poorly resourced, independent Android managing a new wild west app store system. That sounds like the opposite of a remedy.

I know Google isn't perfect. But surely there are options for fixing the parts that need fixing without damaging the broader Android ecosystem. Google provides millions of customers with secure, reliable, inexpensive service and thousands of developers with astonishing resources to innovate and build successful businesses. Why break it?

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