Will Anti-Trust Laws Be Used To Break Up Google?

Talk is increasing about breaking up the Technocrat cabal at Google as it continues to gain hegemony over thought and propaganda. If successful, it will end up a failure as was the case with anti-trust actions in the past. Technocrats will not play political games. TN Editor

Never in the history of the world has a single company had so much control over what people know and think. Yet Washington has been slow to recognize that Google's power is a problem, much less embrace the obvious solution: breaking the company up.

Google accounts for about 90 percent of all Internet searches; by any honest assessment, it holds a monopoly at the very gateway to information in the modern world. From there, the company's power radiates outward, dominating everything from maps to smartphone operating systems to video distribution — vacuuming up huge quantities of highly specific data about users along the way.

Along with Facebook, Google owns sites and services that, by some estimates, influence 70 percent of all Internet traffic. Not coincidentally, the two companies also form a duopoly that gets 73 percent of all digital advertising in the United States, and virtually all the growth in ad spending, on the Internet. Once the lifeblood of a vital free press, and later of a vast array of independent sites serving every possible interest, ad dollars increasingly flow to two tech giants that organize information produced at other people's expense.

Google's power is bound to grow still more. Last year, it spent more on federal lobbying than any other company. By tweaking the way information appears on search pages, Google can already promote its own websites and banish competitors to digital oblivion. (Last year, European regulators fined the company $2.7 billion, alleging that it favored its own services over competitors'.) In coming years, as Google's vast data trove feeds ever more sophisticated artificial-intelligence algorithms, the search giant's lead over its competitors will lengthen.

In the meantime, the company keeps getting bigger. When it can't beat competitors, it buys them, as it has done more than 200 times since going public. Increasingly, startups aspire not to dethrone Google, but to be acquired by it. It comes as little comfort that fellow giants Facebook, Amazon, and Apple hem in Google here and there. Competing in an information economy shouldn't require a market capitalization of a half-trillion dollars or more.

Yet the problem at hand is not merely economic. "A handful of people working at a handful of tech companies steer the thoughts of billions of people every day," notes former Google design ethicist Tristan Harris. A recent study of 10,000 people from 39 countries suggests Google "has likely been determining the outcomes of upwards of 25 percent of the national elections in the world for several years now, with increasing impact each year as Internet penetration has grown."

Why is a breakup of Google so unthinkable? Google's products are undeniably convenient. And, at least on the surface, they're free; average users are paying not with money, but with their personal data. The company has a near-spotless public image. The famous maxim from the company's early years — "don't be evil" — helped cement Google's public image as one of the good guys.

It is ironic that the company perhaps most responsible for unleashing a tidal wave of human creativity, learning, and, yes, competition is also stifling it. It is frustrating competition, discouraging innovation, punishing American business, and distorting the free marketplace of commerce and ideas. Europe has led the wider fight over the right to privacy and the regulation of data, but the time is right for the United States to lead on dismantling tech monopolies — starting with the most powerful player. So, how to start?

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