

ECIS ASKS OTHERS JOIN WITH EUROPE TO OFFER BROWSER CHOICE

- European Consumers get unbiased browser choice
- Microsoft compelled to act as result of complaint by Opera
- European Commission brought charges, reached settlement
- ECIS calls on competition agencies worldwide to follow suit

BRUSSELS, 2 March 2010 – European consumers are getting an unbiased choice of Web browsers because the European Commission has forced Microsoft to change its business practices, acting on a complaint from Norwegian Web browser maker Opera. **ECIS calls on competition agencies around the world to give their consumers the benefit of browser choice, which will spur competition and improve the Web experience for all.**

Microsoft is notifying European Windows users who have Internet Explorer as their default browser that they may choose from among a dozen non-Microsoft browsers, such as Opera, Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome. A “choice screen” is also being provided to buyers of new Windows systems.

Opera is a member of ECIS, which supported the complaint to the European Commission because it promoted the ECIS core values of competition, interoperability and consumer choice. Microsoft agreed to change its business practices in the face of formal charges from the Commission. **Consumers deserve the same unbiased browser choice on all the world’s more than 1 billion personal computers.**

“Browsers are launching pads. You can access social networks, listen to music, watch movies, get mail, read newspapers and magazines, work remotely from your school or office and make phone calls,” said Thomas Vinje, ECIS legal counsel and spokesman.

“The ability of all of these applications to run quickly and with improved features depends upon progress in Web browsers. As we know from experience, that is driven by competition that offers rewards to companies that build the quickest, most versatile browsers,” he said.

“The European initiative will help spur competition, but leaves most of the world’s computers with operating systems that are tied to Internet Explorer. We call on competition authorities around the world to look closely at what has happened in Europe and to act on behalf of their consumers,” he said. “Only then will we get a fully competitive market that will drive intense competition to build better browsers.”

Microsoft has bundled its own Internet Explorer Web browser with Windows and most users accept it instead of trolling the Web for alternatives. Because Windows runs on 90 percent of the world’s computers, that bundling has slowed innovation in browsers. During the first years of this century, it ground almost to a halt when there was little competition.

Internet Explorer, which runs only on Windows, sometimes uses special computer coding. Web pages created to those special standards will not run properly on other Web browsers, making it necessary to use a Microsoft system to read them.

“We hope browser choice will lead to more interoperability,” Vinje said.

Microsoft settled with the European Commission in December rather than face more trouble on top of Commission fines totalling more than \$2 billion for other instances of abusing its dominance in operating systems.

United States courts found a decade ago that Microsoft violated the Sherman Act by abusing its monopoly in order to damage rival browser Netscape. However, U.S. government remedies did not include a requirement that Microsoft provide a choice of browsers.

BACKGROUND:

The European Commission's announcement welcoming browser choice, 2 March 2010:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/216&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

The European Commission's announcement of the settlement in December, 2009:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1941>

Opera's comment on the settlement in December, including a timeline of the case:

<http://www.opera.com/press/releases/2009/12/16/>

Microsoft's comment on the settlement in December:

<http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/press/2009/dec09/12-16statement.msp>

Opera press release, original complaint, 2007

<http://www.opera.com/press/releases/2007/12/13/>

About ECIS

ECIS is an international non-profit association founded in 1989 that strives to promote market conditions in the ICT sector allowing vigorous competition on the merits and a diversity of consumer choice. ECIS has actively represented its members on many issues related to interoperability and competition before European, national and international bodies, including the EU institutions and WIPO. ECIS' members include large and smaller information and communications technology hardware and software providers Adobe, Corel, IBM, Nokia, Opera, Oracle, RealNetworks, Red Hat, and Sun Microsystems.

ECIS media desk: info@ecis.eu or +322 706 23 15

Further background: David Lawsky +32 472 91 47 48

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