

[REDACTED] response to the CMA's consultation on proposed Google search conduct requirements

[REDACTED] owns leading online platforms for buying and selling [REDACTED].

[ONLINE PLATFORM] is pleased that the CMA has made progress in its Google search SMS investigation and that the proposed conduct requirements have been drafted with a view to increasing fairness, trust and transparency in Google's general search and search advertising services. Implementing these conduct requirements should go some way to levelling the playing field for online platforms including the [REDACTED] companies.

[ONLINE PLATFORM] wishes to make the following observations for the CMA to consider when refining the drafting of its conduct requirements and updating the interpretative notes prior to finalisation.

Fair ranking conduct requirement – transparency

[ONLINE PLATFORM], like other online businesses which rely on click-throughs from the Google SERP, is pleased to see proposed measures that will result in the Google SERP being fairer and more transparent.

For [ONLINE PLATFORM], transparency is the key concern to ensure that businesses are not kept in the dark in relation to Google's policies that will impact their business. [ONLINE PLATFORM] was therefore pleased that CR(5)(a) specifically requires Google to provide information publicly in relation to its SERP ranking and ranking within search generative AI features.

Google does not currently provide transparency of the amount of traffic generated by AI Overviews, because Google's reporting tools do not differentiate between performance in AI Overviews and performance in the organic search results. This has led to a misleading representation of how Google search is performing for the [REDACTED] companies. Google will often present a [REDACTED] company as having performed at the top of the SERP (known as 'Position 0'). This would have previously been valuable and meant that the company had performed at the top of the search results. However, now what Google means is that the company has appeared in the AI Overview, which is significantly less valuable, given it corresponds with far fewer clicks. [ONLINE PLATFORM] needs disaggregated data to understand the impact of AI Overviews vs organic results, both of which are now essential access points to consumers. This point does not seem to be covered in the CMA's proposed approach, but it is crucially important that it is.

It is implicit in the CMA's approach that the transparency data should be provided free of charge by Google, but we recommend that this is stated explicitly to avoid future disputes.

In relation to CR(5)(b), [ONLINE PLATFORM] agrees that it is important for businesses to be provided with sufficient notice and information in advance of any material changes to the key ranking criteria, policies and procedures that affect such ranking. [ONLINE PLATFORM] considers it essential that the information provided for each new SERP feature should include a consideration of the impact on click-through rates and on organic search results.

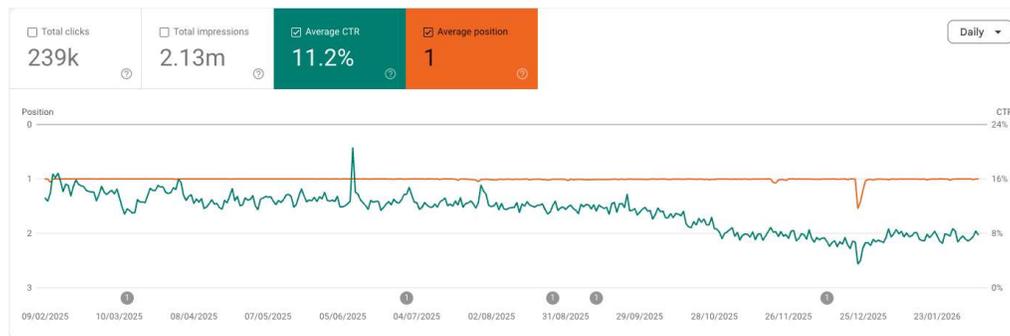
As an example, in February 2025, Google changed the layout of the SERP such that the top paid search position includes several drop-down boxes¹ and in October 2025 Google rolled out the new layout for

¹ Driving better performance from AI-powered Search ads with increased asset flexibility - Google Ads Help, available at: <https://support.google.com/google-ads/answer/15967262?hl=en>. Last accessed 25 February 2026.

group text ads.² An example of the new SERP layout is shown in the screenshot below.

[REDACTED SCREENSHOT]

Google has marketed these changes as a way of providing greater asset flexibility, but instead it is prioritising real estate for paid search and moving organic traffic down the SERP, which clearly has a measurable impact on click-through rates. In fact, [ONLINE PLATFORM] has already noticed a gradual decline in click-through rates as a result of Google's changes, which has plateaued as of December 2025. This is shown in the screenshot below.



Separately, [ONLINE PLATFORM] would also like to see specific notice provisions built into the final conduct requirements, or if not possible, into the interpretative notes. [ONLINE PLATFORM] suggests this should be a minimum one month for straightforward changes, and three months for major changes where businesses may need to make technical adaptations to comply with or benefit from the changes.

[ONLINE PLATFORM] supports the CMA's proposed conduct requirement as regarding the enhancements of Google's complaints processes. This has been a significant concern for [ONLINE PLATFORM].

Publisher conduct requirement – transparency

[ONLINE PLATFORM] is also pleased with the CMA's recognition of transparency issues in its proposed publisher conduct requirement. [ONLINE PLATFORM] has been concerned by the limited transparency it has over how its content, gathered for search, is used by Google in AI-generated responses and how users engage with that content.

For [ONLINE PLATFORM], it is essential that the transparency conduct requirements actually provide publishers with enough information to make informed decisions about the new controls available to them, including user impressions, user engagement and click-through rates. This information is essential for publishers as a result of the negative impact that AI Overviews has had on their click-through rates. Access to this information would enable publishers, including those within the [REDACTED], to ensure they are deploying their content team and editorial resources in the most effective way possible to drive click-throughs to their websites, instead of consumers being satisfied with the answer provided in an AI Overview.

[ONLINE PLATFORM] is pleased that CR(4) and (5) explicitly address both a) transparency over

² Google improving navigation and introducing a new control for ads on Google Search, available at: <https://blog.google/products/ads-commerce/google-search-sponsored-results-label/>. Last accessed 25 February 2026.

Google’s use of publisher content and publisher controls; and b) transparency over user engagement.

In relation to a), [ONLINE PLATFORM] welcomes the CMA’s proposal that Google is expected to make available clear and comprehensive information about the controls, for example, via guidance posted on Google Search Central. [ONLINE PLATFORM] appreciates that the CMA has recommended that Google invites representations on whether the information provided is sufficiently clear and take action to respond to any issues, but considers that this is too weak a requirement which could easily be circumvented by Google.

In relation to b), if implemented effectively, [ONLINE PLATFORM] would be eager to receive metrics on user engagement with search content when it is used in search generative AI features. At present, the business considers that it is kept in the dark in relation to the degree of engagement with its content in AI Overviews or AI Mode. [ONLINE PLATFORM] is pleased with the CMA’s proposal that the data Google is required to provide includes all of user impressions, user engagement with the publisher’s search content and click-through-rate and that this data is provided on a disaggregated basis for each publisher and fully disaggregated from other elements of general search.

[ONLINE PLATFORM] supports the CMA’s proposed adoption of measures regarding attribution in CR(6). This has long been a concern for [ONLINE PLATFORM], and the CMA’s conduct requirement will significantly improve the situation.

[ONLINE PLATFORM] also considers that it is essential for Google to be required to share data on the number of "grounding queries", also known as “fan-out queries”. Bing has started to provide this information and it assists publishers with understanding the key phrases AI uses when retrieving content referenced in AI-generated answers. Please see, as an example, the screenshot of Bing’s grounding queries below.

[REDACTED SCREENSHOT]

Publisher conduct requirement – AI Overviews and AI Mode

[ONLINE PLATFORM] notes the CMA’s proposal for publishers to be able to opt out of crawling for AI Overviews and AI Mode, without opting out of crawling for General Search i.e. CR(2) and CR(3). Whilst we understand the CMA’s motivation to split these up, opting-out is no longer a realistic remedy for a business such as the [ONLINE PLATFORM] companies which cannot realistically afford not to feature in AI Overviews as these results now feed into AI Mode which is quickly becoming a commercial entry point for people wanting to make purchases.

Therefore, [ONLINE PLATFORM] considers that the CMA should prioritise designing an effective process for determining fair compensation for publishers for use of content. This is not covered in the CMA’s first batch of conduct requirements and would be something [ONLINE PLATFORM] would like to see the CMA consider as a priority since any delay involves ongoing detriment to businesses such as the [ONLINE PLATFORM] companies. The CMA should not wait for 12 months before implementing the payment for content measures that have been promised since the CMA’s market study in mid-2020 and its joint report with Ofcom in 2021. There is nothing about the publisher controls that would diminish the need for payment for content, so there is no logical reason to wait.

In terms of the practicalities of the CMA’s conduct requirement, it seems sensible for the opting out to be done in robots.txt, rather than via, for example, a control panel that could be ignored. The CMA is also proposing for the opting out to cover both directory-level and page-level, noting that robots.txt doesn’t normally cover the page-level, but “nosnippet” does. These aspects seem sensible at first glance, and it is certainly important for the publisher to be able to opt in and out for different pages on their website.