

Search SMS: Proposed Publisher CR Roundtable

11 February 2026

Introduction

As part of its consultation on proposed conduct requirements (**CRs**) relating to Google's Strategic Market Status (**SMS**) in general search services, launched on 28 January 2026, the CMA held a series of roundtables with affected industry stakeholders to gain feedback on the proposed CRs.

The events were chaired by the Project Director, Digital Markets and attended by other members of the CMA staff including the case team.

This note summarises the views expressed by 43 businesses, 1 academic institution and 10 trade associations who attended the Publisher roundtable. The CMA will consider these views alongside the wider body of evidence it has gathered through the consultation on the CRs.

Overview

The CMA welcomed participants to the roundtable and set out the purpose of the session, ie to explain the proposed Publisher CR and seek views from industry participants on the proposed CR.

CMA staff summarised the proposed CR for publishers, including its aim and scope, as set out in the [consultation document](#). Attendees were given an opportunity to respond and ask questions.

Aim of the Publisher CR

A specialised search provider expressed support for the broad definition of publisher taken by the CMA – 'parties that make content available on the world wide web'. It explained that the issues identified affect all types of businesses, not just news publishers.

A few participants asked about the potential overlap with the UK government's wider ongoing work on AI and copyright. The CMA responded that its proposed CR was focused on addressing issues arising from Google's market power, which are distinct from questions relating to copyright. For example, the CMA is not proposing to mandate whether Google offer an opt-in or opt-out choice, as this is a question subject to consultation by the government. The CMA is in regular communication with the relevant teams working on these policy issues across the government.

A few participants suggested that the CMA should bring forward consideration of whether Google is engaging with publishers on fair and reasonable terms. They argued that Google's bargaining power over publishers is such that a control would not be sufficient for them to secure fair remuneration for use of their content. One participant suggested that if a publisher were to opt-out, Google could simply replace it with content from a competitor. The CMA highlighted that it has publicly shared its intention to wait 12 months from the imposition of the proposed Publisher CR before deciding whether to take further action. It would closely monitor

the impact of the proposed CR, should it be imposed, including across the metrics identified in the consultation document.

A few publishers argued that if generative AI features were to take up progressively more of the search page, then a control would become equivalent to opting out of general search altogether. Google should instead be prevented from bundling these generative AI features into general search at all. The CMA responded that it is not seeking to prevent Google innovating. It has heard from publishers that traditional search remains an important source of traffic and that generative AI controls could offer meaningful choice over how their content is used beyond this purpose. One publisher argued that users should be able to opt out of generative AI features appearing within search. The CMA noted that this point is separate to the aim of this proposed CR.

A few publishers highlighted the need for close coordination between implementation of the proposed Publisher CR and the Fair Ranking CR. One publisher raised a concern that businesses who have previously agreed deals with Google appear to now rank higher in Google Search. The CMA responded that the teams working on the proposed Publisher CR and Fair Ranking CR would be working closely together. The Fair Ranking CR, if imposed, would prevent Google from ranking publishers more favourably on the basis of any commercial or contractual arrangement.

One publisher asked if the CMA has considered the disadvantage faced by non-US companies who are not able to test new features in Google Lab before they launch in the UK. The CMA said that this is not something which has been raised so far in this process, but that it welcomes any submissions on this subject.

Controls

One publisher asked for clarification over whether Google's existing 'nosnippets' control might be considered sufficient for meeting the CMA's objectives. The CMA responded that it has seen evidence that use of 'nosnippets' is likely to affect a publisher's ranking in traditional search and reduce traffic. It therefore did not believe this control was sufficient to meet the proposed requirement.

One publisher asked for clarification of the CMA's understanding of 'product agnostic definition' in the context of generative AI controls. The CMA responded that the intent was to ensure that any new generative AI features or services would automatically fall within scope of the control without publishers having to separately identify them and opt out.

A few participants argued that requiring Google to separate its web crawlers by purpose would be the most effective way of meeting the CMA's aim. One publisher suggested that the CMA's proposed solution appears to require placing more trust in Google and would likely be hard to monitor. Another publisher said that a single web crawler would provide publishers with less transparency over when and for what purpose their content was being gathered than would be possible if Google was required to operate separate search and AI crawlers. The CMA responded that it had not been convinced that requiring Google to separate its crawlers would be a more proportionate intervention. It believed that both solutions would require monitoring

to generate trust over Google's compliance, but that crawler separation appeared likely to be more costly both for Google and the websites being crawled. The CMA has a legal duty to impose the least onerous CR, where it has identified multiple equally effective options that would achieve the intended aim.

A few participants said the proposed exclusion of fine-tuning from Google's generative AI controls seems likely to undermine the effectiveness of the proposed intervention. One trade association said it disagreed with Google's argument that fine-tuning doesn't recreate publisher content and argued that a control including fine-tuning would have value for publishers. The same trade association suggested that the risk of impacting ranking models appears low as Google could be required to keep these models separate. It is unclear why this would lead to Google having to operate duplicate models. A few publishers said it is hard to engage with Google's arguments due to information asymmetry over how its systems work, which demonstrates the importance of transparency obligations. The CMA responded that it currently did not think the inclusion of fine-tuning was necessary for the control to be effective, but that it welcomes any submissions.

A few publishers asked whether Google would be required to remove content from its internal databases if and when a publisher opts out of using its generative AI controls. The CMA responded that the proposed CR would prevent Google from using opted-out content for grounding, and for training future models outside of general search, but would not require Google to remove content from its models once they have been trained as this would be technically very challenging.

One trade association raised a concern that allowing Google to obtain opted-out data from open-source datasets may provide a loophole to circumvent publishers' expressed preferences. The CMA responded that the proposed CR included an anti-circumvention requirement which would prevent Google, for example, paying a third-party crawler to gather content from an opted-out publisher. It had provisionally assessed that it would be reasonable for Google to make use of open-source datasets, which its rivals have access to, where that content has been obtained legally.

A few participants expressed concern that Google's compliance with the proposed publisher CR would be difficult to monitor as Google's systems are likely to be complex and opaque. The CMA responded that it was proposing a package of compliance measures including an initial third-party audit of Google's generative AI controls using techniques such as adversarial testing. One trade association argued that third-party monitoring should continue beyond the initial audit in order to give publishers and other parties confidence in Google's generative AI controls.

Transparency

One participant asked whether the proposed CR specified the timeframe within which Google should provide this information. The CMA said that it did not, but that one way for Google to provide these new metrics would be through Google Search Console in the same way it provided other metrics. The CMA said it welcomes submissions if this is a particular concern.

One publisher said that per-feature performance data would be particularly valuable to understand the differential impact of features on click through rates and the approach their business should take to optimising for each feature. The CMA noted that it was actively consulting on this question and welcomes submissions.

One publisher raised Bing's recent announcement that it will provide additional metrics for publishers to understand the performance of their content in generative AI features. The CMA said it may be valuable to receive evidence from publishers on the utility of the information Bing provides.

One publisher suggested that Google should be required to inform publishers proactively of the availability of its generative AI controls, for example in Google Search Console, to mitigate the risk that smaller publishers may not be aware of the controls and therefore may not be able to make an informed choice.

Attribution

One publisher raised an example of large sections of their article being presented in an AI Overview. Another publisher said that sufficient attribution should include blue links directly within the AI Overview to encourage direct referrals to the source website. Another publisher suggested the CMA should discuss the question of what sufficient attribution entails with other regulators.

One publisher provided an example where their brand was attributed next to an incorrect summary of their review of an item. The CMA referred back to the attribution requirement in the proposed CR and invited further detailed suggestions in writing, as part of the consultation process.

One participant indicated that the proposed CR should go further to require a full complaints process to ensure that publishers can request corrections when their content has been misattributed and ensure consumers are receiving high quality outputs. They also noted that the CMA is requiring a complaints process in the other proposed CRs it was consulting on. The CMA responded that it is actively consulting on whether a generative AI opt-out control at page level may be an effective solution in instances where summaries of articles inaccurately describe source material. Another publisher said that an instant removal may be useful but that removing the content directly would not be a nuanced tool. Publishers might want to investigate the underlying issue further given the personalised nature of the responses.

One participant commented that in order to address inaccurate attribution, transparency and control are both essential: in order to opt pages out where they are causing inaccurate summaries, publishers also need to have transparency over those summaries (in order to know they are inaccurate). Data on which grounding queries are prompting which responses would allow publishers to not have to actively spot these examples of inaccuracy.