

## **Search SMS: Proposed User Choice CR Roundtable**

9 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 30 businesses, 1 academic institution, 1 consumer organisation and 2 trade associations who attended the User Choice 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 that the purpose of the session, ie to explain the proposed User Choice CR and seek views from interested and affected parties.

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

### **Aim and Effectiveness of the User Choice CR**

The CMA set out the aim of the proposed User Choice CR, and how it believed it would be effective in achieving that aim and welcomed views from participants on these points.

A representative of a trade association suggested a choice screen would not be logical where a user chooses to install Chrome (where it was not the default), which implies a choice to use Google's services including Search. The CMA recognised the need to not overwhelm users with burdensome choices, but noted the difference between a choice of browser and search service and that the EU's Digital Markets Act (**DMA**) shows search choice screens on Chrome on iOS devices and desktop.

A search engine asked the CMA if it had considered applying the choice screen to the web feature of the 'on device' search on Android and making APIs available to enable competitors to integrate into these features. The CMA explained that it proposed to intervene in relation to access points that had the highest number of search queries – Chrome and Search Widget – and was considering API access to default settings for third-party providers.

Participants asked for greater clarity over what proportion of devices would be covered by the choice screen and how the CMA calculated that it would reach an extra 15-35 million. The CMA stated the choice screen would cover most new Android devices and, as legacy devices phased out, it would come to cover all Android devices. The CMA clarified that the 15-35 million figure reflected users who would receive a choice screen via Chrome on desktop and iOS devices.

One publisher asked whether the CMA had considered how the movement of AI Assistants from the browser level to the device level would impact the effectiveness of the choice screen. The CMA responded that the proposed User Choice CR was focused on increasing competition in general search. It observed that some AI assistants are used by users for general search purposes. The CMA noted that wider developments relating to AI assistants were being considered as part of the overall work programmes across Search and Mobile.

## **Key Design Considerations**

### ***Discussion on the information screen***

The CMA then asked participants for views on its proposal to include an information screen as part of the proposed User Choice CR.

Participants asked what information would be included and how the CMA intended to surface tangible risks to users through the information screen. The CMA stated that it would want the information screen to explain what the choice is about and its consequences, with a short amount of information about each service listed on the choice screen (without overwhelming users with too much information). This would raise user awareness around the choice and alleviate confusion between search providers and browsers.

A search engine supported the inclusion of an information screen and asked if the DMA information screen would be acceptable. The CMA stated that it would continue to consider the DMA information screen, but would also take into account what would work best for UK consumers.

An advocacy group asked how the CMA would measure effectiveness of the CR, if imposed. The CMA said that it would measure if consumers had increased awareness of, and engagement with, their choice of search provider.

### ***Discussion on eligibility criteria and display of eligible providers***

The CMA set out its eligibility criteria for participation in the choice screen and welcomed feedback.

A trade association for publishers asked the CMA if it anticipated that AI services would qualify to be present on the choice screen. The CMA explained that it wished to use this consultation to collect views on this issue and did not wish to prejudge which services might be included at this stage.

Several participants asked about the incorporation of AI services on the choice screen, including whether to distinguish between those services and more traditional services within

the eligibility criteria and the choice screen itself. The CMA explained that the eligibility criteria were necessary to establish which services were eligible to be present on the choice screen and the CMA was looking to do so in a way that did not hamper market developments and innovation. It was also considering the appropriate way to include any such services in a choice screen and what would need to be included on the information screen to allow consumers to make effective choices.

Another trade association representing the technology industry asked whether the criteria would consider consumer protection and security issues to ensure that only services of appropriate quality are placed in front of UK consumers. The CMA explained that it expected such factors could be considered as part of the proposed eligibility criteria, which were intended to be future proof.

One search engine asked whether an undertaking would be limited to one service on the choice screen. The CMA stated it was considering whether there should be such a limit.

A browser provider asked the CMA to consider interactions with choice screens such as those for browsers and the potential impact on browser providers. The CMA highlighted that the proposed CR related only to Android and Chrome as search access points, but the CMA would consider these interactions across its broader programme of work.

A participant asked the CMA why it was proposing to list services on the choice screen in a random order. The CMA explained that the proposal was informed by evidence from behavioural science and the impact of ordering effects, which demonstrated that being placed in the top of a list can have a significant impact on user engagement. Randomising the order would therefore provide more equal opportunities to all providers. The CMA added that it also wished to balance displaying popular services with smaller or newer offerings.

A search engine asked whether the CMA had considered research which demonstrates that Google should be excluded from top spots on the choice screen to reduce its market share and considered obliging Google to implement mandatory scrolling, so that users must see the whole list before selecting an option. The CMA responded that it was considering requiring users to scroll the full list and that it was hopeful the randomisation would remove the need to prohibit services being displayed in specific positions. The CMA noted that it did not want to inhibit users who wanted to select Google's services as their preferred option from doing so.

A search engine encouraged the CMA to consider the ecological impact of generative AI services, noting that they believed the user intent and use cases of such AI services and traditional search services were quite different. The CMA explained it was doing research into how to ensure consumers would be given the right information to choose between different types of search services if generative AI services were included on the screen.

### ***Discussion on the test drive***

The CMA outlined the test drive feature of the proposed User Choice CR.

A search engine asked the CMA what the length of the 'test-drive' would be. The CMA explained that it had proposed a two-week window: from its analysis of behavioural evidence,

there is a learning cost for users when trialling a new product and was open to further views on this topic.

An advocacy group asked if the CMA had conducted research into the user experience of the choice screen and ‘test-drive’ option and how it would account for the varying level of technical knowledge amongst consumers. The CMA explained that it was in the process of carrying out research on the test drive function and that if the proposed CR were to be imposed it would be for Google to design a choice screen that complied with the requirements set out in the proposed CR.

#### ***Discussion on the frequency of the choice screen***

The CMA welcomed views on the proposed frequency of display of the choice screen.

An advocacy group asked the CMA whether users would be provided with the option to skip the choice screen. The CMA stated it would take this into consideration.

#### ***Discussion on the user journey and search default on Android***

The CMA then set out its proposed changes to the user journey and search default on Android and welcomed feedback.

A search engine expressed support for the proposal, stating that this reinforced the idea that services should be able to prompt users to the default search setting from within search applications. The CMA welcomed further evidence on this point, but noted that Google had raised concerns that such ‘deep linking’ could lead to ‘search hijacking’. The CMA was also asked whether search apps would be able to prompt a user directly and change a user’s default search engine at a system level. The CMA stated that this was not included in its proposal but would take this point into consideration.

#### ***Discussion on Chrome desktop prompts***

The CMA explained its proposal to change the prompt received by users on Google Chrome desktop and sought views.

Some participants raised concerns that Google’s policy doesn’t allow extensions to change both the URL bar and the ‘search box’ on the default ‘new tab screen’ and that the pop-ups used by Google were detrimental to competition. The CMA said that it wanted to take a consistent and principle-based approach across choice architecture elements to ensure that they do not deter switching.

#### ***Discussion on implementation and compliance with the proposed CR***

The CMA then set out and explained its proposed approach to implementation and compliance and invited views on the proposal and its proportionality assessment.

A participant asked for clarification as to whether Google or the CMA would design the choice screen. The CMA explained that it was not best placed to take an active role in the design of the choice screen, but that there would be a continuing role for the CMA to check the choice screen as designed by Google complies with the CR, if implemented and that it may also be



appropriate for market participants to have some visibility of that design process, and take part in discussions. In addition to this, another participant raised a concern that it is important for Google and stakeholders to repeatedly test and trial any design changes prior to the rollout to actual users. In particular, there was a suggestion to ensure that the process to provide feedback and iterate on any design is quick and nimble.

One participant asked if the CMA will set metrics to measure success and whether a low number of users switching would indicate that the effectiveness of the CR had been undermined. The CMA responded that it would consider switching metrics as part of a broader range of information to determine if users were making informed choices. The CMA added that the experience of other market participants would also be a core part of understanding the impact of intervention.

A participant asked whether the public reporting would include data on the number of users selecting each individual search engine or service, as this may raise concerns regarding commercial sensitivity. The CMA stated it would contact market participants before publishing any information that may be commercially sensitive.