IBM offers concession in EU antitrust case

The Associated Press

U.S. computer maker International Business Machines Corp. has offered to make it easier for competitors to provide maintenance services for its mainframe computers, an attempt to get European regulators to close an antitrust probe, the European Commission said Tuesday.

The Commission, the European Union's competition watchdog, opened two investigations into whether IBM was abusing its dominant position in the market for mainframe computers in July 2010. One of the probes focused on the company's profitable maintenance services.

A second investigation, which the Commission closed Tuesday, was examining whether IBM was unfairly tying its mainframe hardware with its operating system.

Mainframes are powerful computers that are used mostly by big companies and governments.

The Commission said it informed IBM in August that its preliminary assessment showed that IBM "may have imposed unreasonable conditions for supplying competing mainframe maintenance service providers."

IBM, according to a notice published in the EU's official journal, said it was offering concessions to the EU and competitors even though it didn't agree with the Commission's initial assessment of a potential abuse of dominance.

The concessions include a commitment by IMB to make spare parts and technical information available to other mainframe maintainers.

In a statement, IBM said it welcomed the decision to close the second investigation and "the proposed resolution of the Commission's investigation of certain IBM mainframe maintenance practices."

The Commission is now asking IBM's competitors and customers to comment on the commitments.

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