FTC: Google to license patents in antitrust case

The Associated Press

Google is agreeing to license certain patents to mobile phone rivals and stop a practice of including snippets from other websites in its search results as part of a settlement to end a 19-month investigation into the search leader's business practices, the Federal Trade Commission said Thursday.

U.S. antitrust regulators added that they have found no evidence to claims that Google unfairly favors its own services in search results.

Google did agree to license patents deemed to be "essential" for rival mobile devices such as Apple Inc.'s iPhone, Research in Motion Ltd.'s BlackBerry and smartphones running on a Microsoft Corp.'s Windows software. Some of the patents in question came as part of Google's $12.4 billion acquisition of device maker Motorola Mobility Holdings earlier this year.

Regulators say Google is also promising that upon request, it will exclude snippets copied from other websites in its summaries of key information, even though the company had insisted the practice is legal under the fair-use provisions of U.S. copyright law. Despite the fair-use practice, Google already had scaled back on the amount of cribbing, or "scraping," of online content after business review site Yelp Inc. lodged one of the complaints that triggered the FTC investigation.

The FTC's investigation focused on allegations that Google has been abusing its dominance in Internet search.

Google's rivals, including Microsoft Corp., say the search company has been highlighting its own services on its influential results page while burying the links to competing sites. Google Inc. has fiercely defended its right to recommend the websites that it believes are the most relevant. The FTC said it saw no evidence of wrongdoing in those recommendations.

Google's stock rose $4.11 to $727.36 in afternoon trading Thursday. Microsoft is down 28 cents at $27.34.

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