



October 7, 2026

The Honorable Andrew N. Ferguson
Chair
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20580

The Honorable Stanley E. Woodward, Jr.
Associate Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Chair Ferguson and Associate Attorney General Woodward:

I am writing to you on behalf of News/Media Alliance (“NMA”) and our thousands of member publishers to again express concerns over Google’s continued exploitation of its access to publisher content while actively undermining publishers’ ability to monetize their content on their own websites that compete with Google through the application of its Site Reputation Abuse and Scaled Content Abuse policies. This is particularly urgent as both the United Kingdom and the European Union have recently investigated these practices and taken actions to protect their publishers against Google, leaving American publishers in a disadvantaged position compared to our international peers.

NMA is a nonprofit organization representing over 2,000 newspaper, magazine, and digital media publishers in the United States, ranging from the largest news and magazine publishers to hyperlocal newspapers, and from digital-only outlets to papers who have printed news for centuries. NMA membership accounts for nearly 90 percent of the daily newspaper circulation in the United States and over 500 individual magazine and digital-only brands.

Google’s Spam Policy Is a Blunt Instrument That Disadvantages U.S. Publishers and Reduces the Public’s Access to Information Online

As noted in previous letters to the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission,¹ and related regulatory submissions,² Google announced in March 2024 that it was adopting new

¹ See, e.g., Letter from News/Media Alliance to Assistant Attorney General Kanter and Chair Khan (May 28, 2024), <https://www.newsmediaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-05-28-Coffey-Ltr-to-DOJ-and-FTC.pdf>.

² Comment of News/Media Alliance on Technology Platform Censorship, FTC-2025-0023 (May 19, 2025), https://www.newsmediaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/FTC-2025-0023-2664_attachment_1.pdf.

policies to tackle “spammy, low-quality content on Search.”³ Among the changes, the Site Reputation Abuse policy is aimed at practices where “websites that have their own great content ... also host low-quality content provided by third parties with the goal of capitalizing on the hosting site's strong reputation,” whereas Scaled Content Abuse Policy addresses “producing content at scale to boost search ranking — whether automation, humans or a combination are involved.”⁴ While the Scaled Content Abuse policy seemingly took effect immediately, the Site Reputation Abuse policy was not implemented until May 2024.

Together, these changes had the effect of de-ranking, and in some instances delisting entirely, publisher websites – or parts thereof – providing coupons and other promotional material, as well as editorial sports betting, lottery, and gaming content. These sites provide valuable and trusted content and resources to millions of American consumers, while also providing other American businesses an efficient way to attract new and retain existing customers through affiliate partnerships. News publishers have published coupons and other promotional material for longer than Google has existed, and such content forms an important part of our community lives, providing local businesses an efficient and trusted way to attract new and retain existing customers, while helping families ease their financial burden. Meanwhile, with the proliferation of legalized sports and iGaming betting, publishers have responded to reader demand for quality responsible content on these topics by making it available online as part of the digital transformation. Additionally, affiliate links often direct readers to pages with related and important content, such as, for example, independent product reviews.

Both the Site Reputation Abuse and Scaled Content Abuse policies were drafted and adopted without any meaningful consultation or discussion with the affected publishers. And for the past two years, Google has implemented both policies – and their subsequent iterations – by fiat, effectively eliminating access to third-party pages carrying promotional material outside Google’s own ecosystem, while also failing to provide any meaningful opportunity for redress. Affected NMA members have had significant and long-standing sections of their web properties or, in some cases, their entire websites de-ranked, in at least one case effectively eliminating Google referral traffic and resulting in 75 percent drop in total reader traffic overnight. Google’s actions have not been algorithmic accidents, with Google having acknowledged that, at least Site Reputation Abuse policy was implemented through manual actions in the beginning.⁵ To make things worse, at the same time as it de-ranked competitors’ properties, Google’s began showing promo codes in response to some queries via its AI Overviews feature.

³ Elizabeth Tucker, *New Ways We’re Tackling Spammy, Low-Quality Content on Search*, GOOGLE BLOG (Mar. 5, 2024), <https://blog.google/products-and-platforms/products/search/google-search-update-march-2024/>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ See, e.g., Matt G. Southern, *Google Confirms: No Algorithmic Actions for Site Reputation Abuse Yet*, SEARCH ENGINE JOURNAL (May 23, 2024), <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-confirms-no-algorithmic-actions-for-site-reputation-abuse-yet/517337/>.

Later changes to the Site Reputation Abuse policy expanded it to impact properties that incorporate third-party or affiliate content, even when such content is overseen and controlled, written, or edited by dedicated staff. This was after at least one affected NMA member had hired 30 additional reporters specifically to comply with Google’s original policy and its exemption for sites with editorial oversight or involvement. Meanwhile, publishers’ attempts to resolve the manual actions through reconsideration requests have been largely futile or, at the very least, unnecessarily cumbersome. Once de-ranked, even in error, it can take Google weeks or months to remove manual actions applied against a site and return the website to its proper position in search results, while at least one publisher engaged in back-and-forth with Google for over a year with no resolution or clarity on the perceived policy violations.

Making itself an arbiter of free speech based on vague criteria (“When evaluating for policy violations, we take into account many different considerations (and we don't simply take a site's claims about how the content was produced at face value) to determine if third-party content is being used in an abusive way.”⁶) is just the most recent example of how Google, instead of competing on the merits of its products, starves publishers of valuable revenue streams and reserves third-party monetization opportunities for itself – thereby restricting competition for its own benefit.

The European Union and the United Kingdom Are Taking Action to Protect Publishers and the Public Against Google’s Market-Distorting Business Practices

In light of publisher concerns over Google’s adoption and implementation of these policies – especially the Site Reputation Abuse policy – the UK’s Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and the European Commission have recently taken actions to protect news and other website publishers. In the UK, the CMA adopted a selection of Fair Ranking conduct requirements that Google needs to meet, including fair ranking and anti-discrimination obligations, advance notice of policy changes, and enhanced appeals frameworks for penalized publishers.⁷ These requirements are expected to become effective later this year.

Meanwhile, the European Commission launched an investigation into Google in November 2025 to evaluate whether Google “applies fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory conditions of access to publishers’ websites on Google Search, which is an obligation under the Digital Markets Act (DMA),” noting that Google “is demoting news media and other publishers’ websites and content in Google search results when those websites include content from commercial partners.”⁸ While the EU investigation is still ongoing, following discussion with the

⁶ Google, *Updating Our Site Reputation Abuse Policy*, GOOGLE SEARCH CENTRAL BLOG (Nov. 19, 2024), <https://developers.google.com/search/blog/2024/11/site-reputation-abuse>.

⁷ *Google Search Fair Ranking Conduct Requirement*, UK COMPETITION AND MARKETS AUTHORITY (Jun. 17, 2026), <https://www.gov.uk/find-digital-markets-measures/google-search-fair-ranking-conduct-requirement>.

⁸ *Commission Opens Investigation into Potential Digital Markets Act Breach by Google in Demoting Media Publishers' Content in Search Results*, EUROPEAN COMMISSION (Nov. 13, 2025), <https://digital-markets->

Commission, Google announced changes to its Site Reputation Policy carving out users inside the European Economic Area (EEA) from the scope of its manual actions, noting that “[f]or users inside the EEA, the impact of the manual action won't apply. The affected section of the site may be separated in our systems so that, over time, it ranks independently from the rest of the site.”⁹

Together, these measures mean that publishers based outside the United States are better positioned to survive and compete in the digital market than American publishers, while American users have less access to online content and speech that has not been sanctioned by Google. While American publishers will be subject to random, unjustified manual actions that can drain three-quarters of their traffic in one go, European publishers will be exempted from this abuse. And where manual actions are still applied, European publishers can challenge those decisions more easily and access appeal mechanisms. In an age where many news cycles are global, this imbalance also has the potential to benefit European businesses who will be able to reach new audiences at the expense of American publishers.

Strong Action Against Google’s Unfair Policies Affecting Online Publishers Would Protect the Competitiveness of American Publishers in the International Marketplace

We commend the Trump Administration for strongly defending the competitiveness of American businesses in the global marketplace. We agree with the Secretary of the Treasury that “unlike much of the last century, the next era of economic competition will not be confined to the movement of goods across oceans and ports. It will be shaped by the platforms, systems, and protocols through which commerce flows in the twenty-first century. In each of these domains, standards can become strategy, for the nation that fails to help write the rules of the next economy will sooner or later answer to those that did. ... If America and our partners set open, secure, market-based standards, then the twenty-first century economy will tilt toward freedom and prosperity by rewarding innovation, protecting intellectual property, and ensuring that competition is not distorted by discrimination.”¹⁰

For American publishers and businesses to thrive in the global digital marketplace, they must be empowered to develop their competitive advantage against big technology companies like Google and foreign competitors alike. It is therefore vital that the Trump Administration takes decisive action against the unfair and market-distortive application and adoption of measures such as Google’s Site Reputation Abuse and Scaled Content Abuse policies. Together, these policies place unnecessary and inappropriate burden on American publishers, allow Google to

act.ec.europa.eu/commission-opens-investigation-potential-digital-markets-act-breach-google-demoting-media-publishers-2025-11-13_en.

⁹ *Update to the Site Reputation Policy*, GOOGLE SEARCH CENTRAL BLOG (Aug. 28, 2026), <https://developers.google.com/search/blog/2026/08/update-site-reputation-policy>.

¹⁰ Scott Bessent, Remarks at The Economic Club of New York’s America 250 Gala Dinner: American Economic Statecraft in the 21st Century (as prepared for delivery) (Jun. 23, 2026), available at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0539>.

act as the arbiter of free speech online, and reduce local businesses' ability to reach new customers.

In light of this abusive conduct, we respectfully request that your agencies open an investigation into Google's conduct regarding its Spam Policies. As Assistant Attorney General nominee Candeub has noted "despite their enormous size, [large online platforms] have avoided significant antitrust liability or prosecution. The reasons for this are not entirely clear."¹¹ Addressing Google's anticompetitive conduct that harms publishers, businesses, and consumers alike should be simple, especially considering Google's market dominance in online search. The United Kingdom and the European Union have taken the first steps. It is now time for the United States to follow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daboffy", written in a cursive style.

Danielle Coffey
President & CEO
News/Media Alliance

¹¹ Elaine Mallon, *Trump's Antitrust Point Man Could Reshape Big Tech Cases Against Google and Apple if Confirmed*, FOX NEWS (Aug. 5, 2026), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trumps-antitrust-pointman-could-reshape-big-tech-cases-against-google-apple-confirmed>.