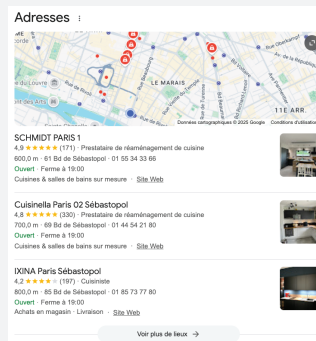


Why Google's typical local search results do not comply with DMA Article 6(5)



Google Map

Google Business Profiles

Digital Markets Act Article 6(5)

"The gatekeeper shall not treat more favourably, in ranking and related indexing and crawling, services and products offered by the gatekeeper itself than similar services or products of a third party. The gatekeeper shall apply transparent, fair and non-discriminatory conditions to such ranking."

1 The Places unit receives favorable ranking treatment.

The Places unit ranks in the first or second unpaid position for the majority of searches Google deems to have local intent and often appears multiple times on the same search result page.

2 Places are not part of Google's primary organic search index.

Places are not generated by crawling third-party websites.

3 The panels linked from Places consist primarily of first-party data from two discrete Google products.

In its own marketing, Google has long referred to the panels linked from Places as Business Profiles, which it offers as a discrete product[†].

Data collected from business users of Google Business Profiles and end users via Google Maps exclusively populates the overwhelming majority of Places units and Google Business Profiles.

4 The Places unit is similar to third-party products.

Myriad third party vertical search services (TripAdvisor, Yelp, My-Hammer/Travaux, Houzz, to name a few) offer similar business listing products.

5 The Places unit discriminates against third-party Profiles.

Vertical search services' profiles are ineligible for inclusion within Google Business Profiles[‡]; only businesses eligible for Google Business Profiles appear in the Places unit.

[†] https://www.google.com/intl/en_ie/business/

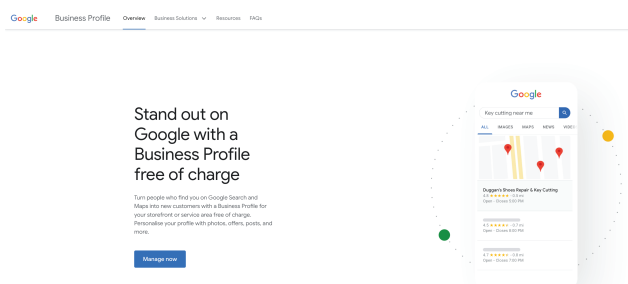
[‡] <https://support.google.com/business/answer/13763036>

"Search Result Page Previews" are Google Business Profiles

In its 2025 Compliance Report¹, Google claims that Places links point to "Search Results Page Previews" and repeats its 2024 claim that no Places unit links point to separate Vertical Search Services of Google.

Google's positioning of Business Profiles as an integrated part of organic search results, rather than a discrete Google product, is a material misrepresentation.

In its own marketing^{2,3} Google has long described what it now calls "Previews" in DMA Compliance Reports as Business Profiles – a discrete Google product.⁴



Google Business Profiles product homepage²

Clicks from the Places unit, including those on the Map or the More Places "Finder" link beneath still go to Business Profiles, which very clearly falls within the bounds of DMA Article 6(5).

Even if one accepts Google's misrepresentation of these Profiles as "SERP Previews," they still fail to comply with Article 6(5). These "Previews" invariably privilege Google's own products, with reviews and photos from Google Maps and Business Profiles.

The Hotel "offers and reviews from VSSs with links to VSS websites" Google cites in its Compliance Report (seen at right) are dominated by sponsored ads.

In our September 2024 study, free clicks to VSSs made up only 25% of clicks from these result blocks (and free clicks to Suppliers only 39%).⁵

Forcing Suppliers to outbid well-funded VSSs, especially gatekeeper Booking.com, for clicks from their own Business Profile to their own website hardly seems a desirable outcome for the digital market.

To date, Google's DMA-related changes obfuscate the fact that both Aggregators and Suppliers should benefit from fair and contestable local search results.

Bad-faith Hotels experiment

Google's November 2024 10-blue-link experiment in the Hotel vertical⁶ – showing that Suppliers would suffer if Business Profiles are no longer featured at the top of the SERP⁷ – promotes a false dichotomy.

Since its "Venice" update in 2012⁸, Google's organic algorithm has typically ranked local SME Supplier websites quite well, even for competitive terms without geo-modifiers, e.g. "estate agents," for queries performed by searchers in their area.

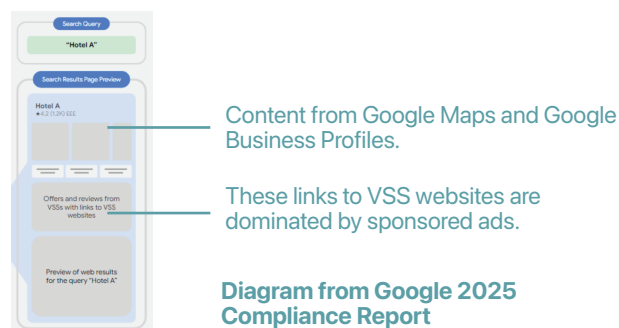
Our recent research in the Home Services vertical⁹ is a prime example: the websites of local SME Suppliers received a meaningful number of organic result clicks.

Not applying this same algorithmic logic in the Hotel vertical experiment was a conscious choice on the part of Google.

Provoking user dissatisfaction by reverting the design of the search results page to 10 blue links was another conscious choice.

If, as we suspect, Google's own user data shows a strong consumer preference for a map-centered interface with star ratings and images, the DMA does not require Google to degrade the search experience by removing it entirely.

A take-it-or-leave-it approach to the current Google Business Profiles interface belies the talent of the company's innovative designers and engineers.



Google's post-DMA interface elements do not place third-party vertical search services on a "fair and non-discriminatory" footing with Google's own products.

Ranking discrimination via user interface

The three most appealing search result elements with which European local searchers engage are ratings & reviews, photos, and the Google Map.^{5,9,10} (Prices are also a key element in the Hotels vertical but Google only displays this element for Hotels.)

Critically, the Places Sites unit introduced by Google following the enactment of the DMA includes neither a map nor ratings and reviews, and only occasionally includes photos.

Users rarely engage with this unit, clicking within it barely 2% of the time it appears. The Places Sites chip/filter receives similarly-low engagement.^{5,9,10}

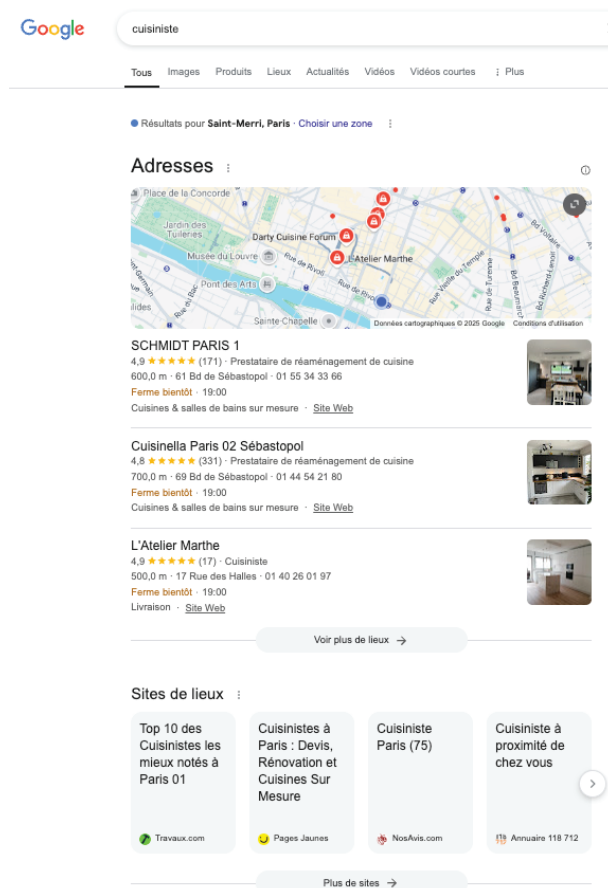
The size and interactivity of the brightly-colored Map, along with the photos and star ratings of Business Profiles, capture the plurality of user clicks—even when positioned below the Places Sites unit.

The interface discrepancy creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop. Because Google's algorithm rewards result blocks with high user engagement, the "common and consistent ranking framework" Google cites in its Compliance Report will always favor the huge, visually-appealing Places unit over less visually-compelling third-party results.

Based solely on the *position* of the Places Sites unit, one respected industry observer expected clicks to Hotel Business Profiles to drop by 50 to 66%.¹¹

The visual discrepancy between Business Profiles and Places Sites units explains the anemic impact of Places Sites relative to expected position-based clickthrough rates (2% vs. +50%).

Segregating Aggregators into an inferior Places Sites interface which lacks the most engaging elements of Google's own Places unit does not create "fair and non-discriminatory conditions" to ranking.



While specific treatments vary by query and market, the representative screenshot above shows the difference in size, position, color, and user interface elements between Google Business Profiles and Places Sites. Our joint study with Siinda of kitchen remodeling searches found that 42% of clicks went to Google Business Profiles when they appeared for similar searches; just 2% went to Places Sites when they appeared.⁹

References

- https://storage.googleapis.com/transparencyreport/report-downloads/pdf-report-bb_2024-3-7_2025-3-6_en_v1.pdf
- https://www.google.com/intl/en_ie/business/
- <https://blog.google/products/ads-commerce/connect-local-holiday-shoppers/>
- https://about.google/intl/en_ie/products/
- <https://www.nearmedia.co/dma/european-hotel-search-study/>
- <https://blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/dma-compliance-update/>
- <https://blog.google/feed/sharing-data-on-our-dma-hotels-test>
- <https://search.googleblog.com/2012/02/search-quality-highlights-40-changes.html>
- <https://siinda.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EU-DMA-2024-Final.pdf>
- <https://www.nearmedia.co/dma/google-serp-restaurants-eu-dma-analysis/>
- <https://www.seoclarity.net/blog/impact-digital-markets-act>

About Near Media

Founded by three veteran local and vertical search analysts in 2021, Near Media is an applied market research firm helping businesses maximize their SEO & paid search investments.

Counting both vertical search services and Suppliers among our client base, we regularly publish analyses of search product releases and local search market dynamics.

To date, we've analyzed audio and screen recordings of 700 Google users from Ireland, Germany, France, and Spain searching Google in their native language for restaurants, hotels, and kitchen remodeling professionals.

How we conduct our research

We recruit panels of consumers who agree to share their screens and audio as they perform searches, split evenly across mobile and desktop devices.

A representative search prompt (given to users in their native language), from our October 2024 study conducted in partnership with Siinda, follows below.

You've wanted to remodel your kitchen for a long time and you're finally going to get started on it this summer. You've decided that it's too big a project to take on yourself and you're going to hire professionals for the job.

You decide to search Google to help find professionals for your project.

Browse and click any results you'd like. Please "think out loud" as you search and describe your thoughts and reactions. What results are you drawn to? What elements of the results stand out to you?

Which business or professional(s) would you choose to contact first and WHY?

Once you have made your selection, please state verbally "this is the one I'd choose."

We then analyze the screen and audio recordings and aggregate result attributes, panelists' click patterns, and decision-making criteria.

Siinda

About Siinda

Siinda is more than an association; it's a vibrant community where experts in digital marketing, local search, and technology unite to share insights, stay updated on the latest trends in digital marketing and AI, access valuable market research, and cultivate meaningful partnerships. At Siinda, we connect you with like-minded professionals from around the globe, helping you build lasting relationships. We promote cooperation for mutual success while nurturing connections that empower your business to thrive. We actively advocate for our members and the SMB community in shaping European digital marketing and AI legislation, prioritizing member interests while respecting consumer rights. Siinda is not just an association; it represents a dynamic journey of collaboration.

Additional DMA local search perspectives from Siinda & Near Media

¹ <https://leadershipbeyondborders.libsyn.com/site/guardians-of-digital-fairness-exploring-europes-dma>

² <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesagencycouncil/2025/03/05/the-impact-of-the-eus-digital-markets-act-on-consumer-search-behavior/>