

Mvw. Neelie Kroes
Commissioner for Competition
European Commission
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Madam Commissioner,

I am a French citizen residing in the USA. I am always proud to note the EU's leadership on effective enforcement of competition and privacy laws, and more specifically your office's actions to curb Microsoft's abusive and anticompetitive practices, specially when contrasted with US Federal authorities' mostly ineffectual actions to date.

I am writing to you to inform you of new abuse by Microsoft of its dominant position in personal computer operating systems outside the realms of media software and web browsers already covered by your directorate. The subject and may have escaped your staff's notice, as it is quite technical and has been poorly covered by the press to date.

Microsoft has introduced a multimedia technology called Windows Presentation Foundation, or Silverlight. It is meant to compete with Adobe's Flash and emergent open standards such as HTML5 and SVG. Adobe Flash currently holds the leader's position in Internet video, as it is the underlying technology for sites such as YouTube. Microsoft has amply demonstrated in the past its intent to take over that market, and its willingness to leverage its Windows monopoly to achieve that strategic goal. Users of Microsoft's Internet Explorer get Silverlight installed whether they wish to or not, but users of competing browsers such as Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari or Opera do not. Microsoft has written "plug-in" software for those third-party browsers to increase the reach of Silverlight, much as Adobe did. This is not objectionable in itself, but Microsoft's chosen means of distribution is.

Roughly in March 2009, Microsoft released an update to its .NET framework, an unrelated piece of system software installed on modern Windows systems and required to run many Windows programs. Hidden within this update was the fact it also installed the Windows Presentation Foundation plug-in for Firefox, without proper disclosure to users, or any attempt to seek consent. I describe this in my blog post at:

<http://majid.info/hiblog/?p=231>

To make matters worse, this plug-in is not installed using the normal mechanisms provided by Mozilla, but installs itself in system directories using elevated privileges, and cannot be uninstalled without a cumbersome procedure that Microsoft only provided after strenuous protests from the Firefox user community. This uninstall process only removes one component called ClickOnce (which incidentally introduces major security holes in Firefox) but does not uninstall the Windows Presentation Foundation plugin, which is Microsoft's true Trojan Horse.

In other words, Microsoft is again unlawfully leveraging its control over the Windows operating system and its update mechanisms to install software without user notification and consent, with the aim of furthering its Silverlight software at the expense of competitors like Adobe who do not enjoy such monopoly power.

I urge you to order an investigation of Microsoft's deceptive and anticompetitive practices, which are almost certainly in contravention of any settlement they may have reached with your office concerning media players.

Disclosure: I am not affiliated with Microsoft, Adobe, Mozilla, or any of their partners or competitors, nor do I have any financial or work relationship with any of them. I am just a Firefox user who is frustrated with Microsoft's practices and its continued attempts to unlawfully exploit its monopoly power despite repeated warnings and sanctions from the EU and other national regulators.

Met vriendelijke groet,