



PROTECTING AMERICA'S CONSUMERS

[MAIN MENU](#)[SEARCH](#)

FTC Challenges Intel's Dominance of Worldwide Microprocessor Markets

FTC Charges Anticompetitive Tactics Have Stifled Innovation and Harmed Consumers

FOR RELEASE

December 16, 2009

TAGS: [Competition](#)

The Federal Trade Commission today sued Intel Corp., the world's leading computer chip maker, charging that the company has illegally used its dominant market position for a decade to stifle competition and strengthen its monopoly.

In its complaint, the FTC alleges that Intel has waged a systematic campaign to shut out rivals' competing microchips by cutting off their access to the marketplace. In the process, Intel deprived consumers of choice and innovation in the microchips that comprise the computers' central processing unit, or CPU. These chips are critical components that often are referred to as the "brains" of a computer.

According to the FTC complaint, Intel's anticompetitive tactics were designed to put the brakes on superior competitive products that threatened its monopoly in the CPU microchip market. Over the last decade, this strategy has succeeded in maintaining the Intel monopoly at the expense of consumers, who have been denied access to potentially superior, non-Intel CPU chips and lower prices, the complaint states.

"Intel has engaged in a deliberate campaign to hamstring competitive threats to its monopoly," said Richard A. Feinstein, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Competition. "It's been running roughshod over the principles of fair play and the laws protecting competition on the merits. The Commission's action today seeks to remedy the damage that Intel has done to competition, innovation, and, ultimately, the American consumer."

The FTC's administrative complaint charges that Intel carried out its anticompetitive campaign using threats and rewards aimed at the world's largest computer manufacturers, including Dell, Hewlett-Packard, and IBM, to coerce them not to buy rival computer CPU chips. Intel also used this practice, known as exclusive or restrictive dealing, to prevent computer makers from marketing any machines with non-Intel computer chips.

In addition, allegedly, Intel secretly redesigned key software, known as a compiler, in a way that deliberately stunted the performance of competitors' CPU chips. Intel told its customers and the public that software performed better on Intel CPUs than on competitors' CPUs, but the company deceived them by failing to disclose that these differences were due largely or entirely to Intel's compiler design.

Having succeeded in slowing adoption of competing CPU chips over the past decade until it could catch up to competitors like Advanced Micro Devices, Intel allegedly once again finds itself falling behind the competition – this time in the critical market for graphics processing units, commonly known as GPUs, as well as some other related markets. These products have lessened the need for CPUs, and therefore pose a threat to Intel's monopoly power.

Intel has responded to this competitive challenge by embarking on a similar anticompetitive strategy, which aims to preserve its CPU monopoly by smothering potential competition from GPU chips such as those made by Nvidia, the FTC complaint charges. As part of this latest campaign, Intel misled and deceived potential competitors in order to protect its monopoly. The complaint alleges that there also is a dangerous probability that Intel's unfair methods of competition could allow it to extend its monopoly into the GPU chip markets.

According to the FTC's complaint, Intel's anticompetitive tactics violate Section 5 of the FTC Act, which is broader than the antitrust laws and prohibits unfair methods of competition, and deceptive acts and practices in commerce. Critically, unlike an antitrust violation, a violation of Section 5 cannot be used to establish liability for plaintiffs to seek triple damages in private litigation against the same defendant. The complaint also alleges that Intel engaged in illegal monopolization, attempted monopolization and monopoly maintenance, also in violation of Section 5 of the FTC Act.

To remedy the anticompetitive damage alleged in the complaint, the FTC is seeking an order which includes provisions that would prevent Intel from using threats, bundled prices, or other offers to encourage exclusive deals, hamper competition, or unfairly manipulate the prices of its CPU or GPU chips. The FTC also may seek an order prohibiting Intel from unreasonably excluding or inhibiting the sale of competitive CPUs or GPUs, and prohibiting Intel from making or distributing products that impair the performance—or apparent performance—of non-Intel CPUs or GPUs.

The Commission vote approving the administrative complaint was 3-0, with Commissioner William E. Kovacic recused, and Commissioner J. Thomas Rosch issuing a separate statement in which he concurs in part and dissents in part from the Commission vote.

Chairman Leibowitz and Commissioner Rosch issued a statement outlining the rationale for bringing the case under Section 5 of the FTC Act, which can be found on the FTC's Web site and as a link to this press release. In his concurring and dissenting statement, Commissioner Rosch described the legal principles that limit an FTC Act Section 5 claim in this case, and the problems that could result from adding follow-on Sherman Act Section 2 claims. A copy of the Commissioner's statement also can be found on the FTC's Web site and as a link to this press release.

Under the recently implemented rule expediting the Part 3 administrative hearing process, this matter is tentatively scheduled to be heard before an Administrative Law Judge on September 15, 2010, at 10:00 a.m.

NOTE: The Commission issues a complaint when it has "reason to believe" that the law has been or is being violated, and it appears to the Commission that a proceeding is in the public interest. The issuance of a complaint is not a finding or ruling that the respondent has violated the law. The complaint marks the beginning of a proceeding in which the allegations will be ruled upon after a formal hearing.

The FTC's Bureau of Competition works with the Bureau of Economics to investigate alleged anticompetitive business practices and, when appropriate, recommends that the Commission take law enforcement action. To inform the Bureau about particular business practices, call 202-326-3300, send an e-mail to antitrust@ftc.gov, or write to the Office of Policy and Coordination, Room 394, Bureau of Competition, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W., Washington, DC 20580. To learn more about the Bureau of Competition, read "Competition Counts" at <http://www.ftc.gov/competitioncounts>.

(FTC File No.: 061-0247)

(Intel.final.wpd)

CONTACT INFORMATION

MEDIA CONTACT:

Cecelia Prewett

Director, Office of Public Affairs

202-326-2180

Mitchell J. Katz

Office of Public Affairs

202-326-2161

Peter Kaplan

Office of Public Affairs

202-326-2180

STAFF CONTACT:

Richard Feinstein

Director, Bureau of Competition

202-326-3658



Related Cases

[Intel Corporation, In the Matter of](#)

Related Actions

[Concurring and Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Rosch, In the Matter of Intel Corporation](#)

[Statement of Chairman Leibowitz and Commissioner Rosch, In the Matter of Intel Corporation](#)

Media Resources

Our [Media Resources](#) library provides one-stop collections of materials on numerous issues in which the FTC has been actively engaged. These pages are especially useful for members of the media.

Contact
Stay Connected
Privacy Policy
FTC en español

ABOUT THE FTC

What We Do
Our History
Commissioners
Bureaus & Offices
Biographies
Budgets
Performance
Office of Inspector General
FOIA
Careers at the FTC

NEWS & EVENTS

Press Releases
Commission Actions
Media Resources
Events Calendar
Speeches
Audio/Video
Social Media
Blogs

ENFORCEMENT

Cases and Proceedings
Premerger Notification Program
Merger Review
Anticompetitive Practices
Rules

Statutes

Consumer Sentinel Network

Criminal Liaison Unit

POLICY

Advocacy

Advisory Opinions

Cooperation Agreements

Federal Register Notices

Reports

Testimony

Public Comments

Policy Statements

International

TIPS & ADVICE

For Consumers

Business Center

Competition Guidance

I WOULD LIKE TO...

Submit a Consumer Complaint to the FTC

File a Comment

Get a Free Copy of My Credit Report

List a Number on the National Do Not Call Registry

Report An Antitrust Violation

File Documents in Adjudicative Proceedings

SITE INFORMATION

Privacy Policy

Website Policy

No FEAR Act

USA.gov

Accessibility

Digital Government Strategy

Open Government

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Headquarters:
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580
Contact Us

Stay Connected with the FTC