

Microsoft
European Government Affairs
Rue Montoyer 51
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Mr. Didier Reynders
Commissioner for Justice
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels

Brussels, 30 March 2020

Dear Commissioner ~~Reynders~~, *Dear Didier,*

On behalf of CEO Satya Nadella I want to thank you for your letter of 24 March on steps the European Commission and the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Network are taking to address unfair commercial practices online that seek to exploit the COVID-19 crisis. We recognise the enormity of the challenges facing all of us today which is why the Commission's and your leadership is critical. Let me underline that Microsoft is committed to working closely with the European Commission as well as European governments to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

Thank you also for alerting us of the most frequent and serious types of online scams and other unfair business practices relating to COVID-19 that European authorities are confronting. This responds to your request for information on steps that Microsoft is taking to address these and related types of unfair practices, and to present consumers with authoritative information about the COVID-19 crisis. Allow me to update you on a number of steps we have taken.

As an initial matter, Microsoft Advertising, which serves the ads displayed alongside Bing's algorithmic search results, has taken precautionary measures to block ads that are directly related to COVID-19, under Microsoft Advertising's Disallowed Content policy. That policy prohibits advertising on "sensitive" issues, and we are relying on that policy provision to prohibit all advertising that exploits COVID-19 for commercial gain, spreads misinformation, or that may pose a danger to user health or safety.

Microsoft with its Bing search engine implements a sophisticated ranking process across all search results that focuses not only on relevance, but also on ensuring that high-authority sources of information rank higher in search results than low-authority sites. Bing is constantly refining its algorithms and the metrics it uses to measure them to prevent manipulation of its search results by bad actors, and to ensure that high-quality sites rank higher than low-quality ones. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Bing has taken additional steps to promote access to trusted information on Bing and to combat fraud and misinformation. These steps include the following:

- In many markets, Bing is ensuring that Answers and/or helpful Public Service Announcements (PSAs) about COVID-19 will figure at the top of search results for a number of COVID-19-related search queries. The Answers provide up-to-date information and statistics on the current state of the pandemic, as well as information on symptoms, testing, treatment, and other issues based on data from authoritative sources such as the World Health Organization and relevant national health authorities.
- For many searches relating to COVID-19, Bing is also showing task panes in prominent places on the first page of search results (such as the top right-hand side of the page). These task panes provide users with credible, authoritative information about COVID-19, such as steps people can take to reduce the risk of catching or spreading the virus.
- Bing is also prioritizing results from trusted news sources when responding to search queries relating to COVID-19. For certain queries, Bing will point users to special COVID-19 “information hubs” on Microsoft News. The articles in these information hubs, currently available in 39 markets globally, are curated by the Microsoft News editorial team from news content sourced from over 4500 trusted news brands worldwide with which Microsoft has license agreements. These hubs also contain links to official tools and information sources on the crisis. A blog post from Bing and Microsoft News announcing the launch of these information hubs is available at <https://blogs.bing.com/search/march-2020/Stay-informed-on-the-coronavirus-pandemic-with-Bing-and-Microsoft-News>. Our features to promote high authority content, which have launched with English versions and are now expanding to more and more features and more languages and markets, will continue to advance.
- For example, we have built a dedicated page which features maps, statistics, and news in currently 32 languages with global coverage: <https://bing.com/covid>.
- Relatedly, Microsoft has a long-standing partnership with NewsGuard, a highly regarded news rating service, to provide a free plug-in for the Microsoft Edge web browser, as well as an opt-in news rating feature for the Edge mobile application on both iOS and Android. NewsGuard operates a coronavirus misinformation tracker that lists all of the news and information sites in France, Italy, Germany, the UK, and the United States that it has identified as publishing materially false information about the virus. When Edge users who have installed the plug-in navigate to these sites, a NewsGuard label appears warning the user that the information on the site is unreliable. Further information about the NewsGuard coronavirus misinformation tracker is available here: <https://www.newsguardtech.com/coronavirus-misinformation-tracking-center/>.



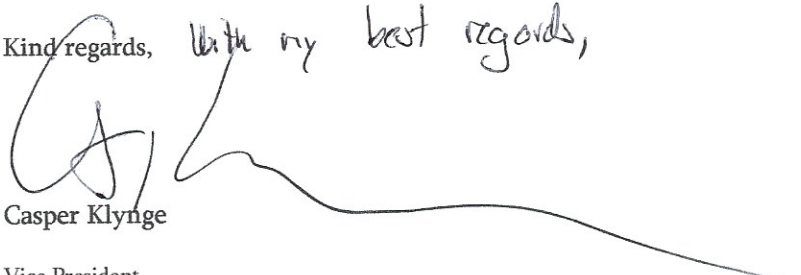
- We are taking similar measures on LinkedIn to present users with trusted and authoritative information. For instance, LinkedIn sends members in Europe a “European Daily Rundown” that links members to LinkedIn’s official European page for the coronavirus. This page contains information and recent updates from verified and official sources, such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the European Public Health Association, the European Commission, and local governments. The European Daily Rundown is distributed to members in all 27 EU Member States and has a reach of approximately 9.7 million members every day (Monday through Saturday). LinkedIn has local editions of the European Daily Rundown in French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch and German that also feature dedicated newsfeeds on the coronavirus. They are written and curated by a team of 18 experienced journalists based in 6 EU countries.

The measures outlined above represent only a small fraction of the efforts Microsoft is taking to help our customers, partners, employees, and the many communities in which we operate respond to the COVID-19 crisis. We have in this regard created a dedicated online resource that provides information and links to a wide range of Microsoft efforts and initiatives. That resource, entitled “Responding to COVID-19 together,” is available at <https://news.microsoft.com/covid-19-response/>.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any further questions. And let me also take this opportunity to personally thank you once again for delivering the keynote address at our recent Data Science & Law Forum in Brussels. I am grateful that you found time to share your perspectives and insights on the Commission’s ongoing work on i.a. Artificial Intelligence and the European data strategy.

Kind regards,

With my best regards,


Casper Klynge

Vice President
European Government Affairs