

# Amazon prioritizes search results for its own products above competitors, per The Markup report

Article

**The news:** Amazon heavily favors its own products and sponsored items in search results, regardless of whether competing products have higher ratings or review counts, according to a report published last week from The Markup .

- Per the report, Amazon-owned or sponsored products made up **only 6% of all products** in the sample, but knowing whether a product was Amazon-owned or sponsored could predict if it would show up in the top search result **seven times out of 10**.
- Of 3,492 search results for popular product queries collected in the sample, The Markup found **60%** were highlighted as “sponsored” products with the remaining **40%** being split equally between Amazon-owned brands and third-party competitors.

**The details:** The report alleges that, in addition to prioritizing its own products, Amazon often hides whether a product is sponsored in search results.

- Amazon’s products often appeared above those from competitors, even if they had higher review scores and counts, often thought to be a determiner of a product’s visibility.
- In one example, The Markup found an Amazon-owned cereal with four stars and over 1,000 ratings appeared in search results over a competitor with five stars and over 14,000 ratings.
- Users are often none the wiser: A survey conducted in partnership with **YouGov** found only 17% of Amazon users think the platform prioritizes its own products over competitors in search results.

**What is and isn’t an Amazon brand is unclear:** The Markup found over 150 brands that are owned and registered by Amazon with the **US Patent and Trademark Office** but are not marked as such in Amazon’s search results.

- **Amazon Basics** is perhaps the best-known Amazon brand, but brands like **Aqua Plus, Mama Bear, Elemara**, and others are harder to spot because Amazon doesn’t label them as such in search results.
- According to the report, 87% of the top listings which were Amazon-owned or exclusive contained invisible “sponsored” tags in their source code but not visible in the search results, suggesting many of the top results are ads.

**What it means for Amazon:** Critics and competitors have long suspected Amazon took part in such practices, but the company has denied it before Congress as recently as 2019.

- Regulators are currently considering legislation that would ban the practices described in The Markup's report.
- Two former antitrust officials—a former assistant attorney general with the **Department of Justice's Antitrust Division** and the former advertising practices associate director at the **FTC**—said the actions alleged by The Markup should bring on an investigation and could be in violation of antitrust regulation, including the **US Sherman Antitrust Act**.

**Why it matters:** Regulators are turning a more watchful eye to Big Tech, and Amazon's market share only **continues to grow**, especially during the ecommerce shift brought on by the pandemic.

- The company will have to add transparency to its search results to ease scrutiny, or it may find itself having to rewrite its practices due to new regulation.