

GOOGLE FINED FOR ESTABLISHING A DECEPTIVE HOTEL CLASSIFICATION IN FRANCE



The French hotel industry celebrates its victory. Google will pay a fine of one million euros to France for having constituted a “misleading hotel classification” in the country, replacing the official classification of one to five stars with the one established according to its own criteria.

Launched in 2019, an investigation by the Direction Générale de la Concurrence, de la Consommation et de la Répression des Fraudes (DGCCRF) has **“demonstrated the deceptive nature of the classification of hotels by Google, particularly on its search engine”, according to a press release.**

Consequently, “the companies Google Ireland and Google France have rectified their actions and, with the agreement of the public prosecutor in Paris, have agreed to pay a fine of 1.1 million euros as a part of a penal transaction”. On the side, the main hotel and restaurant trade union, UMIH, Laurent Duc, president of the hotel branch, said he was “very satisfied”.

“It was crucial for us to protect the stars of classified accommodations: the hotel classification made by Atout France (the national tourism authority) rates more than 250 things in the facilities: surface area of the room, presence of a bathroom, number of sockets etc,” he said.

The Star Rating Reserved for the Official Hotel Classification

Google “didn't want to hear anything and continued to use stars based on consumer comments, which misled the public because in France stars are only awarded to classified hotels, tourist residences and campsites. If they put small flowers or small pointed hats, there would be no problem,” said Laurent Duc.

The rating, previously attributed to establishments based on information from various third-party sources publicly available online, now, as Google confirms, reflects only the official French ranking of hotels on Google Search and Maps, Google France.

The DGCCRF, after receiving “complaints from hoteliers denouncing the posting on Google of a misleading classification of tourist accommodation”, had checked in 2019 and 2020 “the nature and fairness of the information provided by the platform”.

Google Guilty of Misleading Commercial Practice

The rankings of more than 7,500 establishments had been compared, “in a significant number of cases”, to the “only official ranking existing in France and issued by Atout France”, ranging from one to five stars.

It had thus appeared that Google “had substituted the Atout France ranking with a classification established according to its own criteria”, which “was highly confusing in its presentation and by the identical use of the term “stars”, according to the same scale from one to five, to classify tourist

accommodations”.

This practice, “particularly damaging for consumers who were misled about the level of services they could expect” when reserving accommodation, **was also detrimental to hotels “whose establishments were wrongly presented as having a lower rating than in the official classification** of Atout France”, according to the DGCCRF.

Considering that this “constituted a misleading commercial practice”, the DGCCRF forwarded the conclusions of its investigations to the Paris Public Prosecutor's Office, which resulted in a settlement. Google has been using the official ranking issued by Atout France since September 2019.

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