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China Praises the Internet as It Strangles It



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While extolling the Internet's merits, the Chinese government makes no bones about the fact that it intends to continue restricting the content available to its populace. Still, determined Web users can find ways to slip through its grip. The Tor Project, for example, works by distributing transactions over several places on the Internet, so no single point can link users to their destinations.

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China's State Council Information Office has published a whitepaper outlining its view of the Internet -- along with a reaffirmation that it intends to continue to restrict access to it.

For the most part, the paper, which also was posted in an [English language version](#), expresses admiration of the Internet.

It is an "important booster of nationwide information technology (IT) application, sound development of the economy and society, enhancement of scientific and technological innovation, and livelihood improvement," reads the translated text.

There are currently 384 million Internet users in China -- about 29 percent of the population. The government hopes to increase that percentage to 45 percent in the next five years by closing the "digital gaps" that exist in some rural areas, the paper says.

Such developments as blogs, video-sharing sites and bulletin boards create "a broader space" for its people to communicate and share ideas. However, it continues, there is still a need for the government to stop "illegal information dissemination" on the Internet -- information that might threaten national security , upset the civil order or harm minors.

In other words, it is business as usual for China.

Most Restrictive

China has one of the most restrictive policies toward Internet usage in the world -- and it maintains an extensive electronic net, along with 30,000 human censors, to make sure its laws are followed.

It also requires foreign companies operating within its borders to follow the law -- a policy that has caused some high-profile tension over the years, most recently with [Google](#) (Nasdaq: GOOG) and GoDaddy. Google [pulled out of China](#) in protest of its censorship policies earlier this year. More recently, it was revealed during Congressional hearings that GoDaddy and Network Solutions [discontinued their domain name registration activities in China](#) in the wake of stepped-up requests for detailed customer information.

"China casts a very wide net as it seeks to block access to certain sites," said Usha Haley co-author of *The Chinese Tao of Business*.

"It also follows people online who they believe are engaged in suspect talk," Haley told TechNewsWorld.

It is unclear what the motivations were behind the whitepaper, she said, but its conclusions come as no surprise to anyone familiar with China's policies.

"They will never change this mindset," she said.

Holding Back the Dam?

To keep its control over the Internet, the Chinese government maintains a sophisticated system of filtering software, firewalls and proxy servers blocking access at gateway points to the Internet. It continues to build out this network, Haley said -- often using Western technology it got from companies that seek to do business in the country.

It is a flexible system that is unlikely to stretch at the seams even as China adds more Internet users.

"As you get more and smarter mice, the government builds bigger and smarter mousetraps," she remarked.

This extensive network and the [severe penalties](#) China tends to mete out against dissident Internet users are enough to keep much of China's Internet-using population behind the government's firewall.

Determined to Break Free

For determined and technologically adept users, though, there are some options for unfettered access to the Internet.

The [Tor Project](#) can be used by anyone seeking anonymity -- from law enforcement officials to bloggers, to human rights activists.

Such organizations as [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#) and [Global Voices](#) have either consulted with or recommended its use in countries such as China, the project claims.

It works by distributing transactions over several places on the Internet, so no single point can link users to their destinations.

Some 30,000 Chinese users [used Tor](#) when the Chinese government blocked access to the public relays during the contaminated milk scandal in September 2008, Roger Dingledine, creator of the project, told Network World.

There are also tools users can download, Christopher Ciabarra, principal with [Network Intercept](#), told TechNewsWorld.

[VPN](#) technology can encrypt data for secure communications that would evade the censors and filtering technology, he pointed out.

[Open VPN](#), for example, is a free client that can be downloaded.

"If people are determined enough," said Ciabarra, "they will find a way." [ECT](#)

Next Article in Internet

[HP Delivers Web-Based Printing but It's Not Clear Who Wants It](#)

June 08, 2010



As the world heads farther down the paperless path, is a printer that can take orders from any Web-based device -- cool as that may be -- much more than a novelty? It's a good feature, but that alone isn't likely to make it a successful standalone product, said Josh Martin of Strategy Analytics. "We live in a digital age, and this is an analog solution."

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