

Google to step up anti-porn efforts in China

June 19 2009, By CHRISOPHER BODEEN , Associated Press Writer



FILE - In this March 30, 2009 file photo, a woman talks on her cell phone while using a laptop at a ceremony to launch Google's free music download service for China in Beijing. Google Inc. said Friday, June 19, 2009, that it would step up efforts to stop pornography reaching Google users in China after a mainland watchdog found the search engine turned up a large number of links to obscene and vulgar sites. (AP Photo/Alexander F. Yuan, File)

(AP) -- Google Inc. said Friday that it was working to block pornography reaching users of its Chinese service after a mainland watchdog found the search engine turned up large numbers of links to obscene and vulgar sites.

Google said in a statement that company officials had met government representatives "to discuss problems with the Google.cn service and its serving of pornographic images and content based on foreign language searches.

"We have been continually working to deal with pornographic content - and material that is harmful to children - on the Web in China," the statement said.

The statement followed accusations from the China Internet Illegal Information Reporting Center that Google had failed to "filter pornographic contents from its search engine results according to China's relevant laws and regulations."

The watchdog said tests found that the search engine provided links to a large number of lewd and vulgar pictures, videos and articles, though it gave no specific examples.

China, with the world's largest population of Internet users at more than 298 million, has the world's most extensive system of Web monitoring and [censorship](#) and has issued numerous regulations in response to the rise of blogging and other trends.

While the government claims the main targets are pornography, online gambling, and other sites deemed harmful to society, critics say that often acts as cover for detecting and blocking sensitive political content.

State media reported Friday that the government had stopped some of Google.cn's search functions. Details weren't given, and it wasn't exactly clear what had been closed off.

In its statement, Google said the company was working to fix any problems with improper searches. "This has been a substantial engineering effort, and we believe we have addressed the large majority of the problem results," it said.

Google, headquartered in Mountain View, California, has struggled to expand in China, where it says it has about 30 percent of the search

market. China's homegrown Baidu [search engine](#) remains the most popular, with about 60 percent of the market.

The company launched Google.cn with a Chinese partner after seeing its market share erode as government filters slowed access for Chinese users to its U.S. service.

While sites on topics such as the banned Falun Gong sect or Tibetan independence are perennially blocked in China, readers could still gain some access to such information through Google's cache function.

Google.cn returns search results on sensitive political topics only for sites not offensive to the government. Human rights activists have criticized the new service, which excludes search results on human rights, the Dalai Lama and other topics banned by the communist government.

The accusations against [Google.cn](#) come as a controversy simmers in [China](#) over a government order to load Internet-filtering software on every new computer sold on the mainland from July 1.

The government says the Green Dam Youth Escort software is aimed at blocking violence and pornography, but users who have tried it say it also prohibits visiting sites that discuss homosexuality and even blocks images of pigs because it confuses them with naked human bodies, according to Hong Kong media reports.

The software has also aroused safety concerns, with computer scientists at the University of Michigan reporting last week that it contained "serious security vulnerabilities due to programming errors," and recommended users protect themselves by uninstalling Green Dam immediately.

After a major outcry by citizens used to the relative freedom of online life, legal challenges and petitions, the government appears to have backed off slightly, saying users would not be obligated to use or install the software.

On the Net:

American site: <http://www.google.com>

Chinese site: <http://www.google.cn>

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