

US building tech tools to foil online censors

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A man uses a laptop computer at a wireless cafe in Beijing in July 2009. The US agency behind Voice of America said Friday it is working on ways to slip news past tough Internet blockades in countries such as China and Iran.

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The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) confirmed that it is crafting "feed over email" software capable of turning popular Web-based email services such as Gmail, Yahoo! Mail, or Hotmail into conduits for online news.

"It is very powerful, but not ready for beta testing," the agency's director of technology Ken Berman told AFP.

"We are not there yet; this is just a cool thing we are working on."

FOE software is intended to take advantage of encryption technology in free Web-based email services to create secure channels for news found anywhere on the [Internet](#), according to Berman.

"Some countries block the news. My team tries to offer tools to defeat that censorship on the Internet."

When FOE is ready, it will be beta tested in China and Iran, according to the BBG.

"China is the benchmark, the gold standard, of Internet [censorship](#)," Berman said. "We try things. The idea is to extend freedom of the Internet; freedom of the press, freedom of inquiry to those that want to know more."

A BBG engineer demonstrated FOE technology to large audience of software experts at the annual DefCon gathering of hackers in Las Vegas about two weeks ago.

"It's not a covert program," Berman said. "Everything we do is in the open, unclassified. We are a broadcast agency."

BBG handles the US government's non-military broadcasting, including Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia, Voice of America, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks.

BBG reports that its broadcasters distribute programming in 60 languages to an estimated weekly audience of 175 million people via radio, TV, the Internet and other new media.

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