

# Internet firm in China stops using Google services

March 23 2010, By JEREMIAH MARQUEZ , AP Business Writer

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A new Chinese-language Google search homepage is seen on a computer screen at an Internet cafe in Beijing Tuesday, March 23, 2010. China's government reacted testily Tuesday to Google Inc.'s decision to stop censoring its China-based search engine, calling the move "totally wrong" and accusing the company of violating promises. (AP Photo/Alexander F. Yuan)

(AP) -- An Internet company run by one of Asia's richest men said Tuesday it has ended its affiliation with Google Inc. as the American search giant stopped censoring the Internet in violation of Chinese regulations.

Making good on threats made more than two months ago, [Google](#) began shifting its Chinese-based search functions to Hong Kong, a Chinese territory where companies are not legally required to censor [Internet search results](#).

TOM Online, a mainland Chinese Internet firm controlled by Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing, said Tuesday it was stopping use of Google's search services after "the expiry of agreement."

"TOM reiterated that as a Chinese company, we adhere to rules and regulations in [China](#) where we operate our businesses," the company's parent, Hong Kong-based TOM Group, said in a statement Tuesday.

TOM Online, which runs online and mobile Internet services in mainland China, did not say when it stopped using Google or provide any details of its agreement with the company.

TOM likely used Google's search box feature, allowing visitors to its Web site to search the Internet with the U.S. company's technology.

It's still unclear whether other Chinese companies that partner with Google will follow suit. Representatives for heavyweight Internet portal operator Sina Corp. did not answer calls seeking comment Tuesday.

Companies, however, are liable to think twice about maintaining a partnership with a company that has been condemned by Beijing for running afoul of its censorship rules. From a business perspective, there are also uncertainties and risks for mainland Internet users relying on a Hong Kong service that could end up blocked.

[China Mobile](#), the world's largest phone company by subscribers, with more than 500 million accounts, could find its partnership with Google for mobile search services in danger, analysts at brokerage CLSA said in a recent report.

"Some of the Chinese companies may want to play it safe and look at other options," said Elinor Leung, CLSA's head of Asia Internet and telecommunications research in Hong Kong.

Google's action did not translate into unfiltered results for millions of Chinese, but shifted responsibility for restricting content to the central government and its formidable Web filters.

Hong Kong, a former British colony with a separate government and civil liberties denied mainland Chinese, maintains open Internet policies.

The territory's government "does not censor the content of Web sites hosted in Hong Kong" and "places no restrictions on access to Hong Kong based Web sites from anywhere in the world," the government said in a statement.

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