

Chinese site bans Web tools used to evade filters

August 23 2011, By JOE McDONALD , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- A major Chinese online commerce site has banned sales of software used to bypass Internet censorship amid Beijing's efforts to block the development of a Middle East-style protest movement.

But Taobao.com, part of e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, said it took the action on its own and received no official order.

A notice on Taobao.com said [virtual private networks](#) and [Internet protocol](#) proxies were being used to illegally visit foreign websites. It told merchants that use the site to stop selling them and said the accounts of violaters might be canceled.

China's government encourages Internet use for business and education but tries to block access to material deemed subversive or pornographic.

Beijing is especially uneasy about the Internet's potential to spread opposition to communist rule after [social networking](#) and other websites played a key role in protests that brought down governments in Egypt and Tunisia.

Taobao's move was the result of a routine review of which products the company wants to be sold on its site, said John Spelich, Alibaba Group's vice president for international corporate affairs. He said he knew of no government instruction to stop sales.

"We are constantly looking at products that we sell and asking ourselves,

is this the right business to be in for any number of mercantile reasons?" Spelich said.

"A decision was taken that this was a business that we probably should not be in, so we exited," he said. "I'm not aware of anybody asking us to stop."

The Chinese government's efforts to control Internet use have prompted the rise of a thriving industry that sells tools for Web surfers to evade its filters.

Nearly two weeks after Taobao's sales ban, some merchants on the site still were advertising VPNs and similar products on Tuesday.

Spelich said [Taobao](#) also bans products such as shark fins and some types of animal fur that are legal but that it doesn't want to sell for commercial reasons. The company says it has 7 million merchants and some 800 million products on its site.

More information: Taobao.com (in Chinese):
<http://www.taobao.com/index-global.php>

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