

China's number of Web users rises to 513 million

January 16 2012, By JOE McDONALD , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- The number of Internet users in China has surged past 500 million as millions of new Web surfers go online using mobile phones and tablet computers, an industry group reported Monday.

The popularity of the [Internet in China](#) has driven the explosive growth of profitable [Web companies](#) and made fortunes for some Chinese entrepreneurs despite government controls on what the public can see online.

The number of mainland Internet users rose to 513 million in December, up 12 percent from a year earlier, the government-sanctioned [China](#) Internet Network Information Center said.

Among them, the number who go online using handheld devices rose 17.5 percent over a year earlier to 356 million.

The popularity of wireless Internet was reflected Friday in a scramble by Chinese gadget fans and scalpers to buy Apple Inc.'s latest [iPhone](#) 4S, which sold out within hours of its China launch.

Angry customers shouted and threw eggs at Apple's flagship Beijing outlet after the company failed to open the store, citing the size of the crowd. Apple postponed further iPhone 4S sales at its mainland stores for safety reasons but said they will be sold online and through its local carrier, China Unicom Ltd.

The communist government encourages Internet use for business and education but tries to block access to material it deems pornographic or subversive.

The government is strengthening its control over popular microblogs after a bullet train crash last July that killed 40 people prompted an online outpouring of criticism of the official response.

Microblog services have been ordered to monitor postings content more closely and remove objectionable material, while news media were barred from reporting online material without firsthand verification.

Despite such controls, popular online services such as portals Sina.com and Sohu.com, video websites Youku.com and Tudou.com and search engine Baidu report growing traffic and revenues.

Outlets owned by the ruling Communist Party or by the government also have jumped into the market, launching their own search engines and other services.

On Friday, regulators approved an initial public stock offering by the online arm of the ruling party newspaper People's Daily, people.com, on the Shanghai Stock Exchange to raise 527 million yuan (\$85 million).

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