

Google execs woo Cuba IT students

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People queue at an internet service provider in Havana, on January 20, 2015

Cuba may have one of the lowest rates of Internet access in the world, but that hasn't dissuaded Google from sending over some of its leading lights.

Executives from its in-house think tank Google Ideas are on a visit to the communist island—which is in the throes of trying to normalize relations with the United States—to tour universities and meet computer science

[students](#), news portal Cubadebate said Friday.

They include the deputy director of Google Ideas, Scott Carpenter, and Brett Perlmutter, a top Google figure who went to Cuba last June with executive chairman Eric Schmidt.

The latest visitors met students at the University of Information Science (UCI) in Havana, a technological institute and several public computer centers known as "Youth Clubs."

Just 3.4 percent of households in Cuba are connected to the Internet and the government keeps tight control over the web, though it vowed last month to "put the Internet at the service of all" to stimulate economic growth.

The historic announcement in December that Washington and Havana would resume relations after more than five decades of Cold War animosity has raised Cubans' hopes that they could soon have regular Internet access via the United States.

It has also put companies in the US and beyond on alert, hoping to cash in on the rapprochement.

"It can't be a coincidence that two of the top executives visiting the country belong to Google Ideas, the subsidiary dedicated to 'exploring how technology can enable people to confront threats in the face of conflict, instability and repression,' as its mission statement reads," said Cubadebate.

The news portal said students told the executives that they still could not download certain applications from the Google Play online store to their cell phones despite Google's recent move to unblock Cubans' access.

Cubadebate said the students also expressed interest in selling video games developed at UCI on Google Play. But the Google team said it would "not be possible for the moment," the website said.

A number of complex issues still divide Havana and Washington, including a punishing trade embargo, which President Barack Obama would need Congressional approval to lift.

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