

China tells search engines to ID paid results after man died

June 25 2016, by Didi Tang



In this Sept. 2, 2011 file photo, a photographer walks past the logo of Baidu Inc., which operates China's dominant search engine, during a technology innovation conference held by the company at China's National Convention Center in Beijing, China. China issued new regulations on Saturday, June 25, 2016 demanding search engines clearly identify paid search results, months after a terminally-ill cancer patient complained that he was misled by the giant search engine Baidu. (AP Photo/Alexander F. Yuan, File)

China issued new regulations on Saturday demanding that search engines

clearly identify paid search results, months after a terminally ill cancer patient complained that he was misled by the giant search engine Baidu.

Wei Zexi, a college student who died in April of a rare cancer, had written a long post on a Chinese website detailing how he was led to a Beijing hospital for treatments after searching on Baidu. He said that the treatment turned out to be ineffective and expensive and that later he learned the therapy was yet to be fully approved.

Wei accused Baidu of taking money to promote less proven treatments.

The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) announced on its website the new regulations, which also ban search engines from showing subversive content and obscene information. Such prohibitions have long been in place, but it is the first time China explicitly has regulated paid search results.

The administration said search engines must review the qualifications of paying clients, clearly identify paid results, and limit the number of paid results on a web page.

When Wei's post became publicly known in May, Baidu was widely denounced for its practice of blurring promotional search results with legitimate ones on the home search page. Its chief executive Robin Li was called in by China's web regulators for talks.

By May 9, Baidu agreed to take corrective steps as demanded by a joint investigation team, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Baidu removed 126 million promotional search results for medical information and 2,518 medical institutes from its search pages. It agreed to set aside 1 billion yuan (\$150 million) to compensate users defrauded by misleading promotional results. And it would no longer rank

promotional results solely on bidding prices, Xinhua reported.

On Saturday, a Baidu representative responded by pledging to work with regulators and web users "to provide objective, impartial and authoritative search results."

"Baidu will comply fully with relevant laws and regulations as outlined by the CAC, " Baidu spokeswoman Tracy Hu wrote in an email.. "Baidu will work closely with government agencies, Internet users and the community to uphold a healthy Internet environment."

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