

China's online population swells to 384 million

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People are seen surfing the internet at a cafe in Shanghai. The number of Internet users in China, already the largest in the world, rose to 384 million by the end of 2009, a government-linked industry body said Friday.

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The online population in the world's most populous nation increased by 28.9 percent last year from the end of 2008, the [China](#) Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) said in a report published on its website.

Users accessing the Internet with mobile phones jumped by 120 million last year to 233 million, with the fast expansion of the country's third-generation (3G) network, allowing high-speed transmission of images

and video, it said.

The report added that Chinese web users are most interested in music, news and [search engine](#) services.

China's spiralling online population has turned the Internet into a forum for citizens to express their opinions in a way rarely seen in a country where the traditional media is under strict government control.

The growing strength and influence of the web population has prompted concern in Beijing about the Internet's potential as a tool for generating social unrest, and authorities have stepped up surveillance in recent years.

The government blocks web content that it deems politically sensitive in a vast system dubbed the "Great Firewall of China".

This week, Internet giant [Google](#) said it was considering shutting down its google.cn search engine and ending its operations in China altogether over a series of cyber attacks believed to have originated in the Asian nation.

It also said it was no longer willing to filter its search results, as demanded by Chinese government censors.

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