

New online Google tool shows where services blocked (Update)

21 September 2010, by Chris Lefkow



A woman looks on from behind a laptop computer screen displaying the new landing page on google.cn, which links to an uncensored Hong Kong site on July 2010 in Beijing. Google released a new online tool on Tuesday that shows where the Internet giant's services such as YouTube are being blocked around the world.

Google released a new online tool on Tuesday that shows where the Internet giant's services and products such as YouTube are being blocked around the world.

"We believe that this kind of transparency can be a deterrent to censorship," David Drummond, Google's chief legal officer, said.

"When Google's services are blocked or filtered, we can't serve our users effectively," Drummond said in a blog post. "That's why we act every day to maximize free expression and access to information."

He said the new tool, which is called "Transparency Report" and located at google.com/transparencyreport, will "allow people to see where governments are demanding that we remove content and where Google services are being blocked."

Drummond said it will help show whether traffic disruptions in services and products such as Google Search, Google Earth, Google Maps, Google News and YouTube "are related to mechanical outages or are government-induced."

"By showing outages, the traffic graphs visualize disruptions in the free flow of information, whether it's a government blocking information or a cable being cut," he said.

The Transparency Report shows that YouTube has been blocked in Iran, for example, since June 12, 2009 following the country's disputed presidential election.

Google already maintains such a tool for its services and products in China, which has blocked YouTube since March 2009 and criticized the Mountain View, California-based company over its refusal to censor Web search results.

Drummond said the separate tool, the "Mainland China service availability chart," is being shut down and China will now be integrated into the list of countries whose traffic is being monitored using the Transparency Report.

Google on Tuesday also updated another online tool, "Government Requests," that shows how often governments around the world ask the search giant for information about users or ask that it take down or censor content.

In launching the interactive online map in April, Google said it would be updated in six-month increments.

The latest period covers January-June 2010 and now includes figures on the percentage of demands that Google has complied with -- if not details of the actual requests.

The United States, for example, tops the list with 4,287 requests for data and 128 removal requests. Google said 82.8 percent of the removal requests had been "fully or partially complied with."

There were 2,435 data requests from Brazil and 398 removal requests, 67.6 percent of which were

fully or partially complied with. Google said most had to do with the Google-owned social network Orkut, which is popular in Brazil.

India was next with 1,430 data requests and 30 removal requests, 53.3 percent of which were fully or partially complied with.

Google also noted that China is not listed among the countries on the Government Requests page.

"Chinese officials consider censorship demands as state secrets, so we cannot disclose that information at this time," Google said.

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