

Facebook opens Hong Kong office in Asia push

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A woman types her password to enter Facebook via her phone. Facebook has opened a Hong Kong office as it looks to boost its presence in Asia, even though the social networking giant is banned in mainland China, a potentially huge market.

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The opening of the sales office in Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous Chinese territory, comes after Facebook opened an office in Singapore last year, as [social networking sites](#) and Internet traffic see a marked rise in the region.

Last March the California-based group announced a new office in the southern Indian IT hub of Hyderabad to deal with advertising and customer support.

The Hong Kong opening, "following Singapore demonstrates Facebook's commitment to Asia, and in particular to Hong Kong and Taiwan, where there are active online populations and sophisticated digital marketing communities," Facebook said in a statement Tuesday.

The company, which already has a network of

sales offices in North America and Europe, said more than 80 of the top 100 advertisers in the United States advertise on Facebook, adding that it is working with major brands across Asia.

"We are investing in a team to scale with the business here in the region, and will start with a handful of employees and add more as the business grows," a spokeswoman said.

She declined to disclose the number of Facebook users in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The site has about 500 million users worldwide.

Blake Chandlee, Facebook's vice-president and commercial director for emerging markets, played down the idea that the Hong Kong office is a sign that Facebook is eyeing a move into China -- where it remains banned.

"We have no plans right now to talk about entering into mainland China and trying to be aggressive in that," he told AFP.

Chandlee said the site was available in "all the Chinese dialects" and "for us that is the first step in any part of the world to make sure people are able to experience Facebook in a language they're comfortable with."

Last year, search engine [Google](#) claimed it was the victim of a highly sophisticated cyber attack in mid-December 2009 that originated from China, apparently to gain access to email accounts of Chinese human rights activists.

Google shut down its Chinese search engine, automatically re-routing mainland users to its uncensored site in Hong Kong. The firm later ended the automatic re-direct to avoid having its licence suspended by China.

Other Asian nations have also presented challenges to technology firms with several

countries including Vietnam and Thailand having moved to limit political debate online in recent years by attempting to block some sites, including [Facebook](#).

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