

## CASE 2 China's Great (Fire) Wall

Welcome to modern-day China, where the government blocks Web site access to the country's 618 million Internet users on such subjects as democracy, Tibet, Taiwan, health, education, news, entertainment, religion, and revolution. Various chat rooms, blogs, photo- and video-sharing sites, gaming and podcasting sites, and bulletin boards are also forbidden stops on the Web, and don't even think about googling "Tiananmen Square massacre" or anything remotely considered pornographic.

Building censorship into China's Internet infrastructure is the first step for the country's government in controlling access to politically sensitive material. To accomplish this, the Chinese government prevents Internet service providers (ISPs)—many of them privately held businesses, some with foreign investments—from hosting any material the government calls politically objectionable by holding the ISPs liable for content and imposing severe penalties for violations, including imprisonment.

In addition, the Chinese government targets Internet content providers (ICPs—organizations and individuals who post Web sites, both nonprofit and for profit), who are required to register for and post a license to operate legally, and like ISPs are held liable for politically incorrect content. To keep a license, ICPs must police sites for objectionable content and must take down those sites that violate regulations governing content. Yahoo!, Microsoft's MSN, and Google all act as ICPs in China and have been criticized for complying with China's strict Internet censorship policy.

Managing ISPs and ICPs is not the only tool China has for controlling what content its citizens can access. Beginning operations in 2003, China instituted the Golden Shield Project.

More popularly known as "The Great Firewall of China," the system can automatically filter and block content that the government deems inappropriate. Through IP tracking, blocking, DNS/URL filtering, and redirection, the Golden Shield not only blocks and filters content but acts as a surveillance system as well. The Great Firewall also creates a sluggish and congested network infrastructure, though some believe this is intentional to discourage Internet use.

In 2014, a reported 2,600 popular Web sites were blocked in China, including Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and YouTube.

Historically, many foreign ICPs have cooperated with the Chinese government by censoring information in order to operate in the country. Yahoo!, the only non-Chinese company providing e-mail service in China, has even turned over e-mail content to the authorities, resulting in the prosecution and conviction of at least four persons for criticizing the government. In 2010, however, Google took a different course with China.

In late 2009, Google was hit with a sophisticated attack on its Gmail servers and some of its other corporate networks. Google believed that the attack was an attempt to access the Gmail accounts of human rights activists. Up until then, Google had been censoring content like other ICPs, tailoring results to remove topics deemed subversive or pornographic. However, after the network attack, tensions began to rise between Google and China, as it was widely believed that the attacks came from the Chinese government or were at least sponsored by them in an effort to root out political dissidents. As a result, Google threatened to end its practice of censoring search results or even completely pull its business out of China.

Early in 2010, Google made the decision to redirect all its search traffic in China to servers in Hong Kong, where greater civil liberties remain, effectively ending its practice of censoring results and opening unrestricted searches to the Chinese public. Within days of the move, China began filtering and blocking searches directed to the Hong Kong servers using the Golden Shield system, and even pulled out of lucrative agreements to use Google's Android operating system on a number of mobile platforms. In March 2010, Google's annual license to be an ICP in China expired. In summer 2010, China renewed Google's license, but it remains to be seen how this standoff between the search giant and China will end. Today, Google is "back to normal," operating in China with government-imposed limitations on its search results; several Google applications including Docs, Drive, and Picasa are also blocked.

As is true of most attempts to censor the Internet, tech-savvy users in China find ways to circumvent the government's firewall. One group of Chinese dissidents created Greatfire.org, which includes mirror duplicates of several blocked Web sites. The group also created Freeweibo.com, which collects and publishes posts deleted from China's popular social media service Sina Weibo. Another example is an iPhone app called FireChat, a mobile messaging app designed to allow anonymous group messaging through the iPhone's peer-to-peer and Bluetooth connections. The app was recently used as a part of a political protest in Taiwan, and protesters in Taiwan and China were able to communicate and encourage each other without censorship from the Chinese government.

### Questions

- 10-54.** Should foreign companies provide their technologies to China, knowing that the technologies are used to limit the individual freedom of Chinese citizens? Why or why not?
- 10-55.** Given that China has the largest number of Internet users, do you think they can ultimately succeed in controlling information? Why or why not?
- 10-56.** Should the rest of the world care if China limits information access within China? Why or why not? Now that Google has moved against censorship, do you think other companies will follow suit? Why or why not?

Based on:

August, O. (2007, October 23). The great firewall: China's misguided—and futile—attempt to control what happens online. *Wired*. Retrieved May 21, 2012, from [http://www.wired.com/politics/security/magazine/15-11/ff\\_chinafirewall](http://www.wired.com/politics/security/magazine/15-11/ff_chinafirewall).

Chen, L. (2014, March 20). Breaking through China's Great Firewall. *Business Week*. Retrieved April 22, 2014, from <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-03-20/secretive-web-activists-give-chinese-a-way-around-censorship>.

Horwitz, J. (2014, March 31). Unblockable? Unstoppable? FireChat messaging app unites China and Taiwan in free speech. . . and it's not pretty. *Tech in Asia*. Retrieved April 22, 2014, from <http://www.techinasia.com/unblockable-unstoppable-firechat-messaging-app-unites-china-and-taiwan-in-free-speech-and-its-not-pretty>.

Levin, D. (2014, June 2). China escalating attack on Google. *The New York Times*. Retrieved September 11, 2014, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/03/business/chinas-battle-against-google-heats-up.html>.

Online Censorship in China (2014). Retrieved September 11, 2014, from <https://en.greatfire.org>.

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Go to [mymislab.com](http://mymislab.com) for the following Assisted-graded writing questions:

- 10-57.** Describe information systems risk assessment and explain four ways to approach systems security risk.
- 10-58.** Define and contrast spyware, spam, and cookies.