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Google versus China... have you heard? Is 'The Great Firewall' about to come down?

March 16, 6:49 PM - Technology for Women Examiner - Stephanie Abrams

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FREEDOM OF SPEECH. Seems like a simple concept to us, but it's got the internet and government in a major dispute in China. The Chinese government is now accused of hacking into the gmail accounts of human rights activists to prohibit their freedom of speech, and that's made Google absolutely furious. For a while, google was playing nice and agreeing to censor everything the government wanted out of searches. But now Google is mad, and announced it's done cooperating. The company never said when it'd drop their censorship filters, but a report from Beijing says it may have happened today!

For those of you who haven't followed this controversy.. here's a quick recap:

It all started in 2006, when Google began operating in China. You see.. google is supposed to be a free search engine. Whatever you search should show up, but that's not how it works in China. They have government regulations regarding censorship, and because of the massive growth there many American Internet companies have agreed to those rules. Right, I know what you're thinking.. that's SO unamerican! Here's the reality though, business often comes before our basic moral beliefs because you know how the saying goes, "Money talks..."

Even the world's biggest search engine Google caved to Chinese pressure and under a lot of criticism.. but now it looks like things are about to change. Why? The attacks into google's corporate infrastructure resulted in the theft of intellectual property. When a U.S. investigation into the cyber attacks traced them to a man who works for the Chinese government, Google felt seriously betrayed and explained that the Chinese efforts to thwart freedoms had become too pervasive to accept. FYI, it is important to note that China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said in a press briefing that Google's accusations are groundless and that China would defend its right to censor content.

Last week China started warning Google business partners to prepare for a day when the Google search engine is GONE! Google execs said prepare for the day when the censorship is OVER. And today, March 16th, something happened:

NBC News Beijing reported that previously unsearchable sites discussing controversial topics such as Tiananmen protests resulted in pictures and links! Pictures like this one below showed up on a search that had previously blocked those results.



According to NBC News in Beijing, Google denies lifting the censorship. Execs there say they haven't made any changes yet and they're not sure how these pictures got through. Still, Google CEO Eric Schmidt, says they're on the verge of shutting google.cn down.

This conflict brings up so many questions. How long can the Chinese government repress the thoughts of their own people? We're talking about a MASSIVE population! I mean there are 1.2 BILLION people living there under these very tight censorship rules. Their voice simply can't be quieted forever, can it? In this truly small world of free internet, blogs, emails, and tweets... the government has to realize that at this point they are no longer Goliath. Plus, we're talking about major hot button human rights issues being discussed all around around the world wide web, except for China where it's happening: the violation of the rights of women, one child per family rule, religious persecution, political persecution... the list goes on.

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If you're interested in learning more about why the censorship is so controversial, Amnesty International's website explains it pretty well: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/china/page.do?id=1011134>

But, here's the rub. No matter how much you might think it's time for google to pull out, it could mean hurting the people they ultimately want to help. No google means even LESS internet freedom for people who are already blocked from facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Also, internet businesses in China would lose big on outreach. Financially for Google and China, this would definitely be a lose-lose situation.

If you want to read more about how Google feels about it, it's best to read the announcement on their official blog from January 12th, <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/01/new-approach-to-china.html>

That's where Google explains what lead to this announcement: *"We have decided we are no longer willing to continue censoring our results on Google.cn, and so over the next few weeks we will be discussing with the Chinese government the basis on which we could operate an unfiltered search engine within the law, if at all. We recognize that this may well mean having to shut down Google.cn, and potentially our offices in China."*

Who would have thought Google, a search engine, would have caused such a major disruption in the Chinese government. Could this be the beginning of toppling 'China's Great Firewall'? Let's all watch and learn. Ladies.. mommy bloggers of the world.. what YOU have to say does matter, at least in this country.

So, this female techy blogger really wants to hear from you. Please comment below or write to me personally. I will publish an update on this situation with your reaction, so it would be great if you would include your name and city. <mailto:techymom@hotmail.com> By the way, if you can send me a VIDEO of yourself on camera reacting, I will post that as well.

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