

## GOOGLE MAKES INROADS IN THE GREAT FIREWALL OF CHINA



The Chinese government is known to be very unbending, when it comes to framing laws that lessen the rights of its people, especially when it comes to soliciting information from online sources. The Chinese state censorship on Google of their search engine results inside China is a prime example of this rigidity. Google has found an interesting way to circumvent this legislation. It is not perfect and not as all-encompassing as Google would have liked, but it's interesting all the same. Google's servers are in Hong Kong, located there intentionally to escape censorship issues with China. Searches by users in China are routed through these servers and users have complained that they "can be inconsistent and unreliable." Moreover users frequently get error messages that say "This webpage is not available" or "The connection was reset." Upon investigation, Google's research teams found that these messages were more widespread, when a search mentioned some specific keywords. Google tracked down these keywords and prepared this simple message, which would alert the users, whenever they type the offending words in the search engine. The message read, "***We've observed that searching for [insert search term here] in mainland China may temporarily break your connection to Google. This interruption is outside of Google's control.***" Users are then directed to a link, which will take them to a help center, which informs them of why their search was interrupted and that since their original query is likely to be blocked, they can edit their search term to write out Chinese characters into Latin script, using the pinyin system – to avoid needless blocks. Google found it imperative to intrude when Chinese filters became so stringent that searches failed for even users searching for basic information about restaurants, tourist spots and universities. Google senior vice president, Alan Eustace wrote in his blog, "By prompting people to revise their queries, we hope to reduce these disruptions and improve our user experience from mainland China." That is really very smart of Google. They cannot be accused of interfering in Chinese matters and also very subtly telling the users that they are being censored, whilst also teaching them how to outwit the irrational restriction. However, what could anger Beijing is that Google is listing the very keywords that the Chinese are secretive about. They hide under the guise of 'technical failure,' rather than be open about it and say that searches for these words are not permissible. Google did not say anything about whether a possible Chinese retaliation worried them. Possible reprisal measures could be asking Google's network of advertising sales offices in China to shut shop. Google's Android and other appliances could also face Chinese ostracism. Google would of course have preferred that China was a free country and whatever information the public liked was freely available to them without any censorship. But, alas that is not to be; hence this is as far as Google can go, without arousing the country's ire and vengeance. Ironically, Beijing strongly advocates Internet use for education and business and, even more paradoxically, has the world's biggest population of Internet users, with 513 million people online as of December.