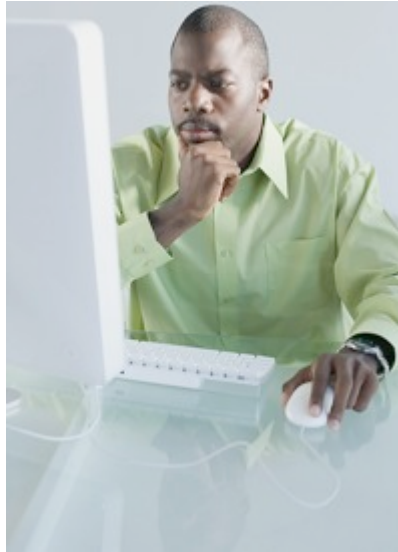




Competing for Best Censorship

In a June 23 article at *The New American* website entitled "[Iran's Internet Spy Tech Suppliers](#)," this writer reported on a deal by Nokia Siemens Networks, a joint venture of German Siemens and Finnish Nokia, that provided Iran with a network monitoring center allowing "the monitoring and interception of all types of voice and data communication on all networks." Internet experts have since determined that Iran's totalitarian government has responded with drastic measures to the unrest spurred by the recent controversial presidential election results.



Iran's government is engaged in "deep packet inspection" of all network communications, meaning they are spying on all online traffic by intercepting it, searching for keywords, and only then allowing it to proceed. It is not known for certain that the Nokia-Siemens equipment is being used for this purpose, but the monitoring center is capable of this extensive surveillance.

One wonders, then, if the executives at Nokia and Siemens had a twinge of conscience, or perhaps a desire to distance themselves from bad publicity, when they later sold off the portion of their joint venture dealing in these "intelligence solutions." How does one sleep at night knowing the money that was made on selling this equipment comes at the price of some Iranian dissident being caught protesting on the Internet and thrown in prison or possibly even killed? What the Iranian government is doing is not the least bit surprising, and any Nokia Siemens Network representative who claims they didn't see this coming is being disingenuous to the point of outright lying.

American firms are no better, and haven't even had the decency or good business sense to distance themselves as Nokia and Siemens have done. Google has been following China's strict censorship standards by filtering search results. Searching for "Tiananmen Square" images from Google's U.S. site will yield tanks and demonstrators, while the same search on Google's Chinese site will yield attractive pictures of the square as it is today. History has been rewritten, erased, expunged, forgotten — and Google makes money from this.

So why did Chinese authorities on June 24 start blocking Google? They claim that Google is letting pornography sites show up in its search results. This is either a convenient excuse for China to crack down for some other more political results slipping through, or Google has a strange taste for what parts of China's censorship code it chooses to ignore.

While Google struggles to do a good enough job of censoring content to please Beijing, Microsoft's search engine, rebranded as Bing, has taken advantage of the situation by agreeing to censor Chinese search results. Way to go Microsoft! Rather than take the high road of resisting China's demands and potentially gaining a lot of good publicity by pointing to Google's problems as a reason not to cave in, Microsoft couldn't wait to prove that it can censor anything better than Google. Sadly, this will now likely degenerate into a race between the two companies to see whose censorship is better.



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on June 26, 2009

Lest the seriousness of this be lost, consider the Chinese version of MySpace. It too uses filtering and doesn't allow posts on forbidden topics such as Taiwan, the Dalai Lama, and Falun Gong. But it goes a step further; users are encouraged, with the simple click of a button, to report others who are "endangering national security, leaking state secrets, subverting the government, undermining national unity, spreading rumors, or disturbing the social order." This is what you agree to when you accept the terms and conditions of using the Chinese MySpace website: any other user may report you to the authorities. Heaven help you if you happen to rub someone the wrong way and they, perhaps with no justification, click that button to turn you in.

The latest controversy between technology firms and China kicks things up a notch even beyond this. Beijing is demanding that all new PCs sold in China as of July 1 will come with its "Green Dam Youth Escort" censorship software pre-installed. This software's tentacles are so all encompassing that it can do much more than filter out pornography and Tiananmen Square from search results. It can monitor literally every keystroke and cause your word processor to crash the moment you type "Falun Gong" or any other forbidden word. This means that your own computer could potentially turn you in by quietly reporting any such crash to the "proper authorities," setting you up for that dreaded knock on the door in the middle of the night.

Will PC companies finally stand up to China's outrageous demands or will they follow Google's and Microsoft's greedy example of whimpering acquiescence? I fear they will only press China for an extension of the July 1 deadline, not for the authorities to rescind their rule.

Does no one have enough sense to realize that if all PC makers stood together, China would have no choice but to back down. Where is China going to turn for an alternative? Will PC users in America and elsewhere not boycott any company that would dare go against a united stand by all PC manufacturers? Even if there are enough foreign companies willing to give in, at least it would be their executives who would be deserving sleepless nights trying to justify to their own consciences the money they have made off every Chinese computer user who is thrown in prison.

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