

Google still censoring for some China customers

ALEXA OLESEN - Associated Press Writer - Associated Press

Google Inc. is still censoring search content for some of its customers in China, a company spokeswoman said Wednesday, in a decision that underscores the Internet giant's delicate effort to hold onto its mainland businesses days after moving its search engine offshore.

The decision to provide censored searches was made to honor contracts with current business partners, and Google will continue to meet those commitments, said Jessica Powell, the company's Tokyo-based spokeswoman. She said that all censoring done by Google in China would be phased out over a time period she would not specify.

"If there are cases where we were providing a censored search and were contractually required to provide censored search, then we will honor those requirements," Powell said. She added separately in an e-mail that over time Google would "not be offering syndicated censored search to any partners in China."

Powell declined to name the customers, but Li Zhi, an analyst for Analysys International, a Beijing research firm, said Google was likely referring to search services on sites such as Sina, China's most popular portal, and Tianya.com, a popular forum site.

More than two months after saying that cyber-attacks, hacking and censorship were causing it to consider leaving China, Google earlier this week began redirecting queries made to its China search address, google.cn, to an uncensored site in Hong Kong. Though part of China, Hong Kong has a semiautonomous status due to its past history as a British colony, and Google is not legally required to censor results there.

Google's deliberations set off a nasty, public dispute with Beijing's Communist government, which disliked having its policy of censoring the Internet questioned. Google's partial pullout has caused consternation among its China-based partners and raised the possibility that they would come under government pressure to stop doing business with the U.S. company.

Mainland users who are redirected to the Hong Kong site are not allowed unfettered access to everything on the Internet. Chinese government Web filters — collectively known as the Great Firewall — still automatically weed out anything considered pornographic or politically sensitive before it can reach computers in China.

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