Brazil: Google data gives bad censorship rap

BRADLEY BROOKS - Associated Press Writer - Associated Press

Brazilian prosecutors said Monday a new Google tool showing government requests for data on users of the Internet giant's services or the removal of content is giving their country a bad rap.

Google Inc. released an online tool last week showing where it faces the most government pressure to remove material and turn over personal information about its users.

Brazil led the roughly 100 countries in which Google operates by making 291 requests to remove data and 3,663 requests for information on users during the last six months of 2009, the period analyzed.

The statistics don't include China, as the censorship demands that Google received while operating in mainland China are not being shared because the information is classified as a state secret.

Priscila Schreiner, a Sao Paulo-based federal prosecutor who heads a government group that investigates child pornography and racism cases on the Internet, said most of Brazil's requests were related to such incidents.

"Google doesn't say where it got the numbers or give details on what the requests were for," Schreiner said. "The Brazilian government is not exercising any type of censorship of any legal expression. We're legally obliged to investigate cases of child pornography and racism and we need the data behind those crimes."

Schreiner said prosecutors delivered to Brazil's Google affiliate an order to hand over documents used to compile the statistics on government requests, so the public will be able to see they were not attempts to censor speech.

Google officials didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. But on a website explaining the tool, the company says the numbers do not include requests related to child pornography.

"Our policies and systems are set up to identify and remove child pornography whenever we become aware of it, regardless of whether that request comes from the government," the site says.

For that reason, Google says, it is "difficult to accurately track which of those removals were requested by governments, and we haven't included those statistics here."

Google said nations like Brazil and India had many government requests "in part because of the popularity of our social networking website" — Orkut.

It said the majority of Brazilian requests for removal of content from Orkut related to alleged impersonation or defamation.

Under Brazilian law, inciting discrimination or prejudice based on race, color, ethnicity or religion on the Internet is a crime punishable by up to five years in prison.

After Brazil, other countries logging at least 1,000 requests for user data were the United States (3,580), Britain (1,166) and India (1,061).

The most requests, after Brazil, to edit material came from Germany, at 188. India was next with 142 requests mostly tied to Orkut, followed by the U.S., where the demands focused on YouTube.

Google says the numbers reported on its tool "are imperfect and may not provide a complete picture of these government requests."

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On the Net:

Google tool: www.google.com/governmentrequests [1]

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http://www.ecnmag.com/news/2010/04/brazil-google-data-gives-bad-censorship-rap

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[1] http://www.google.com/governmentrequests