



YOUR RIGHTS

Despite controls, Chinese get online

Since World Wide Web use started becoming mainstream in the late 1990s, the Chinese government has sought to monitor and control how its citizens use it.

In 2000, the government announced the institution of the Orwellian-named Golden Shield Project, more commonly referred to as the Great Firewall of China, which sought to create a sealed-off Internet. Tens of thousands of government monitors and citizen volunteers collectively known as “Big Mama” regularly monitor blogs, chat forums and even emails to ensure nothing slips through that might challenge official state propaganda. Thousands of websites, including any websites considered to be “dangerous to social security and public order,” are outright blocked. Even destinations such as YouTube, Facebook, Flickr and Wikipedia are blocked or heavily restricted.

Despite those efforts, those who are a little more tech savvy can circumvent the firewall and visit so-called restricted websites -- though not without risks. Amnesty International notes that China “has the largest recorded number of imprisoned journalists and cyber-dissidents in the world.”

The "offenses" these prisoners are accused of include "communicating with groups abroad," "opposing the persecution of the Falun Gong," "signing online petitions" and the topic that government officials the world over fear most: "calling for an end to corruption."

TREND FORECAST: The Chinese government’s control over internet use is reaching a compression point. It is hurting not only the public’s ability to surf the net, but the business community’s ability to interface with the world. While methodologies for circumventing government restrictions may be growing within the general population, corporations are in no position to openly break the law.