fastest responsiveness rate by users in China and was accepted as a clear leader in the market in terms of both brand recognition and usage rates.

But a study by Keynote Customer Experience Rankings acknowledged that the competitive advantages maintained by Google in the United States would be easily transferable to the Chinese market. Chinese customers ranked Google first, beating Baidu, Yahoo, and MSN, in categories such as search quality, image search, and reliability. According to the director of research and public services for Keynote, "We see that Chinese consumers really like the overall Google experience better. Eventually, this promises to translate into increased market share, particularly given Google's strong resources and focus on the market."[8]

With the introduction of Google.cn, Chinese users would be able to access the same search engine with a speed similar to that of Google.com in the United States. Although Chinese users would have previously received the same limited results, it would now be Google—and not the Chinese government—routing the inquiry through its own servers to remove banned content.

NGOS, COMPETITORS, AND CONGRESS MAKE NOISE

On the heels of Google's announcement of its official launch in China, a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) soon voiced strong opinions against Google, a leader by any means in the online arena, engaging in any form of censorship.

Reporters Without Borders (RWB), a Paris-based public interest group acting as a media watchdog on an international level, had already established itself as the leading critic of U.S. search engines that agreed to censor material to gain access to international markets. Beginning in 2004, the group wrote to top U.S. officials, pleading for a code of conduct regarding overseas Internet filtering and condemning attacks on what it considered to be the rights and freedoms of the press.[9] When Google decided to enter the Chinese market two years later, the interest group leapt on the opportunity to bring the issue back into the spotlight.

"Google's statements about respecting online privacy are the height of hypocrisy in view of its strategy in China," said RWB in a January 25, 2006, press release, issued in response to Google's announcement.[10] The group argued that continued censorship would only lead China to become even more isolated from the outside world, a worrisome prospect considering that a 2005 RWB survey of press freedom had ranked China 159 out of 167 countries.[11] "When a search engine collaborates with the government like this, it makes it much easier for the Chinese government to control what is being said on the Internet," said Julien Pain, head of RWB's Internet desk.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the largest human rights organization based in the United States, was preparing its testimony for a February 1 hearing before the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus. The group had a history of investigating key human rights abuses, both within the United States and internationally, and then publishing its findings in an effort to draw exposure to the issue.[12]

The centerpiece of its argument was that the Chinese government would be unable to carry out censorship effectively without the cooperation of U.S. search engines. According to the group, the United States' dominance in the search engine market gave providers considerable leverage against any country that hoped

8 "Google Poses Strong Challenges to Leader Baidu in China, Reports Keynote," *Business Wire*, January 18, 2006.

9 Reporters Without Borders, "About Us," http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=280.

10 "Google Move 'Black Day' for China," BBC News, January 25, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4647398.stm.

11 Howard French, "Despite Web Crackdown, Prevailing Winds Are Free," *The New York Times*, February 9, 2006.

12 Human Rights Watch, "About HRW," http://www.hrw.org/about/whoweare.html.