

to benefit in the Information Age. The group proposed that if all the search engines acted together in refusing to comply with Chinese censorship rules, they would be in position to push for free access within the country.¹³

But despite the strong stance, the group had yet to act on its threat of organizing an international boycott of search engine providers. "How much choice do you have if all of these companies are doing this?" asked Mickey Spiegel, Senior Researcher at HRW. "We're not going to stop using the Internet."¹⁴

Censorship issues aside, both Yahoo and Microsoft's MSN were already posing tough competition to Google's aims to advance its market share in China. Whereas Yahoo elected to place its bets on for the evolution of search engines, Microsoft had the resources to challenge Google in search capability and advertising.¹⁵ Both companies were already complying with Chinese censorship regulations before Google joined the fray and had grappled with their own negative publicity.

Yahoo! came under furious fire for giving the Chinese government information that was used to convict the Chinese Internet journalists Shi Tao in 2004 and Li Zhi in 2003.¹⁶ The company defended its actions by saying that it didn't know how the information would be used. "I do not like the outcome of what happens with these things," said Yahoo cofounder Jerry Yang. "But we have to follow the law."¹⁷ While Yahoo publicly encouraged the American government to handle the issue, the company said that it was too early for itself to recommend how.¹⁸

¹³Tom Malinowski, "U.S.: Put Pressure on Internet Companies to Uphold Freedom of Expression," testimony before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, February 1, 2006, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/02/01/china12592.htm>.

¹⁴Carrie Kirby, "Chinese Internet vs. Free Speech Hard Choices for U.S. Tech Giants," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 18, 2005.

¹⁵Ignatius, "In Search of the Real Google."

¹⁶Kevin Delaney, "Yahoo Outlines Stance on Privacy and Free Speech," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 13, 2006, p. A8.

¹⁷Kirby, "Chinese Internet vs. Free Speech."

¹⁸Delaney, "Yahoo Outlines Stance."

In December 2004, MSN complied with an order from the Chinese government to close a site belonging to Michael Anti, a Beijing-based employee of *The New York Times* and one of China's most popular bloggers, who had been addressing sensitive political issues.¹⁹ Microsoft chairman Bill Gates responded by stating that "The ability to really withhold information no longer exists" and outlining a policy in which sites blocked by government restrictions would still be available in all other parts of the world.²⁰

Although not a direct competitor for Chinese market share, the physical networking provider Cisco Systems was one of the two U.S.-based companies that the Chinese government relied on for a 2004 network upgrade to improve substantially the government's ability to track Internet searches.²¹

Yahoo and Microsoft issued a joint statement on February 1 in support of a collaboration with Google, Cisco, and the U.S. government to create industry guidelines for handling governmental restrictions on their services in the future.²²

The Congressional Human Rights Caucus also met on February 1 to address "Human Rights and the Internet: The People's Republic of China," billed as an effort to encourage policy discussion among Internet companies. Attendance at the briefing was optional, and Yahoo, Google, MSN, and Cisco all chose not to attend.²³ Google released a statement the day of the briefing, thanking the caucus for the invitation and citing a previously scheduled commitment as its reason for not attending.²⁴ (See Appendix B for the official Google Blog.)

¹⁹French, "Despite Web Crackdown."

²⁰Robert McMahon, "Q&A: The Great Firewall of China," The Council on Foreign Relations, February 16, 2006.

²¹Ibid.

²²"Lawmakers Blast Internet Firms over China," *Associated Press*, February 1, 2006, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11134689/from/ET/>.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Andrew McLaughlin, "Human Rights Caucus Briefing," Google Blog, February 1, 2006, <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2006/02/human-rights-caucus-briefing.html>.