

Dousing Firewalls

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Sometimes I miss trends. When it comes to information science and policy, that is not hard to do. While noted in LISTen 106 that we were not sure where trend lines were going, further news since the release of the episode has helped show where things are going.

The notion of a country cutting itself off from what it deems objectionable on the Internet previously was restricted to the People's Republic of China. The efforts of Senator Stephen Conroy in Australia have already shown that even countries outside the Communist sphere can consider the possibility of removing access from the proletariat to things the leadership deems unacceptable. The recent letters by Senator Conroy to Google requesting the removal of access to a few YouTube videos within Australia already show that what was previously deemed dangerous yet fruitless talk can eventually produce action.

Librarians often worry about how to surmount barriers like this. Considering the current paradigms of the profession, solutions are likely not obvious. While new technology and talk of “the cloud” may reign, falling back to older technology may provide the easiest solutions.

With the lack of any known criteria for how Senator Conroy's ministry may seek the withdrawal of access to a site, LISNews quite frankly stands at risk even while we have a distinct audience presence in Australasia. Having access to LISNews disappear would remove a chunk of the profession within the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules world from part of the realm of cultural discourse. Without any known appeal procedures, Blake would be left with part of the site's audience irretrievably gone. While our spam filtering and content monitoring is handled by volunteers, conceivably we could miss something objectionable posted by a user that could incur the wrath of Senator Conroy's ministry.

This is partly why there have been the seemingly strange requests for expressions of interest in alternative forms of communication for LISNews content. The solution to censors like Senator Conroy's ministry or the relevant authority in the People's Republic of China may be to simply diversify how communications take place. While it is easy to look at a great firewall as being akin to holes being plugged in a tremendous dike, it must be remembered that the apocryphal boy plugging holes only has two hands and ten fingers. This is why that even though the cloud may seem nice it also can present a single choke point where a communications system may fail. This is what Senator Conroy is looking to capitalize on in addition to human sloth with respect to things he deems bad or otherwise unworthy of being seen by Australians on the Internet.

Again, the little boy plugging holes has only two hands and ten fingers. Adding concurrent communication can help prevent a firewall from holding. With the relative lack of jammers in the world today, purchasing airtime through a broker such as World Radio Network let alone VT Communications or the Transmitter Documentation Project would allow you to punch in a radio signal via shortwave. As even the United States Navy has shown in the past with research projects at speeds of 9.6 kbps and below, data signals can be effectively handled over shortwave just as much as voice broadcasts can.

To decode unencrypted radio data transmissions, typically all that is needed is a decent shortwave radio with antenna plus a stereo audio patch cable with 3.5 millimeter plug ends and a recent model computer

using free open source software. With only a minor amount of shopping around, a decent shortwave radio and antenna can be picked up for about USD\$100. In this case the cost to receive is far lower than the cost to transmit.

This is where the economics of Internet-based publishing are not as cool as prevailing talking heads want the populace to believe. It may seem mostly free to set up a blog or other sort of site. In a world where a pattern of offending blog comments could help make you disappear to a population, it takes hard currency to solve such through a workaround like print or shortwave bombardment. In a world like this, “da little guy” is hardly in any sort of advantageous situation.

Assaults on computer systems of Australian federal ministries have already taken place. The left-leaning ministry of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd shows that the censoring of content is not confined to right-wing conservatives. There is little discrimination on account of politics relative to those who oppose open expression.

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