Understanding & Combating Global Censorship with WordPress

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• Enterprise Support Team, WP Engine
• Four plus years of Web experience abroad
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What you’ll learn from me

• Why and how WordPress and non-WordPress sites get blocked

• Which plugins are blocked and how they affect performance

• What to do when your site is blocked

• How to work around the censored Web
Censorship

Government

Self-Censorship

Religious

Moral
What is Web Censorship

- Domain and IP-level timeout, connection resets, removed content
- Man-in-the-middle attacks, State sponsored DDOS
How is WordPress Affected?

- WordPress is now a quarter of the entire Internet.
- More non-English Downloads than English Downloads.
- "Internet Sovereignty", Segmentation and the Wuzhen Declaration.
- Democratization of the web.
Web & WordPress Censorship
Turkey

• WordPress.com Blocked Because of a Single Blogpost
• 77,000 Known Blocked domains (Ataturk, Armenian Genocide, Erdogan)

Russia

• 2012 Government Decree
• Trolls for hire - New York Times
• "The Agency"
• SORM, DPI - Blocking and Surveillance

The Washington Post

Russia just made a ton of Internet memes illegal

By Caitlin Dewey April 30 2015

ALL YOUR MEMES ARE BELONG TO ME
India

- Fluctuating censorship protocols
- Public discourse & discussion of the web
- Targeted WordPress sites

Vietnam

- Communist state
- Targeted blogs
- Social media sites
- Savviest users
Middle East

- SmartFilter by Secure Computing of San Jose, CA, USA
- Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, UAE
- Lots of individual blogs
- Facebook, Twitter, etc.
China

• Most pervasive form of Internet censorship

• Great Firewall of China promotes harmony

• Causes the most trouble with WordPress
China, cont.

• 96% all traffic within Mainland
• The Three “T’s”
• River Crabs, 50 Centers & Big Mamas

I just tried several times to retweet a critical comment on Weibo by @LiYuan6 about Tianjin but "permission denied"

twitter.com/kevinslaten/st...

10:39 PM - 12 Aug 2015 · Sai Kung District, Hong Kong, 香港
Blocked Plugins & Functionality

- API/External WordPress calls
- Politically-sensitive discussions
- Blocked IPs and domains on shared hosts
- Jetpack, WordPress.com, Gravatar
- Google (Plus, Fonts, Photos)
- Be Mindful: BBPress, Yoast SEO, Social Media
Developing Around Censorship

- Know your blocked plugins
- Limiting reliance on outside sources
- Reconsider SSL
- Government hosting “registration”
- Avoid sensitive discussion
- You are responsible for your users
- Hong Kong hosting
If you get blocked

- Relax
- Confirm (BlockedinIran.com, GreatFire.org)
- Ask your host for help
- Check for Noisy Neighbors
- Consider changing domains/moving servers
What Can The Community Do?

• Continue to Support Non-English WordPress
• Follow and Understand OpenNet Initiative
• Polyglots: Contribute to Core and Plugin Translations
• Talk About it
• Publish, Publish, Publish
What Did We Learn?

- **Why and How of Censorship:**
  - Government directive
  - ISPs, DNS, Social Media

- **Blocked Sites & Plugins:**
  - Jetpack, Social Sign On & Discussion
  - Free discourse, large databases

- **If you’re blocked:**
  - Greafire.org, Blocked in Iran
  - Talk to your host, change domain/IP

- **Working with Censorship**
  - Know the limitations
  - Know your audience
Q & A

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