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[Microsoft's Censorship of Free Speech](#)

Michael Anti just wants to talk about Democracy, is that so wrong? According to the Chinese Government, yes, it is.

Free Speech and Microsoft Censorship This is going to be more of a rant consisting of some general observations along with some verifiable facts, but I hope that it opens some reader's eyes about the censorship issues that are prevalent in other parts of the world and how Microsoft is indeed a part of it all. It seemed as though the Internet was a place where information flowed freely and unabashedly. There was a time when the only thing that could restrict you was the lack of a user name and password. The Internet had little to hide and containment or control wasn't something that most people thought about, in fact, the-more-information-the-better-it-is mentality dominated and this generally holds true today in most parts of the world. The idea that controlling the Net is virtually impossible is being put to the test by the Chinese government. Not only are they trying to do just that, but they're making *Made in the USA where we support free speech* companies adhere to some very detailed free speech censorship. "This space is temporarily unavailable. Please try again later." This little phrase has quickly found infamy among many a Microsoft blogger. Recently, Microsoft has come under close scrutiny when they decided to uphold international Chinese law by taking down a blog written by Chinese journalist Zhao Jing (aka Michael Anti). You might ask yourself, "what's wrong with that? They were upholding another country's law." This is also true, but the question remains about the contents of the actual blog itself and the location of where it was posted. The Bottom line is that it was about Democracy and it was located outside of China's borders. The part of the story that catches most people's attention is the fact that Microsoft itself took down the blog and it wasn't the Chinese government. The question over why a site believed to be hosted in the United States has to comply with Chinese law is a big one itself. Microsoft responded to requests for more information on this issue by stating that "Microsoft is a multinational business and, as such, needs to manage the reality of operating in countries around the world." A Microsoft representative also added that "MSN is committed to ensuring that products and services comply with global and local laws, norms and industry practices. Most countries have laws and practices that require companies providing online services to make the Internet safe for local users. Occasionally, as in China, local laws and practices require consideration of unique elements." In the [Rebecca MacKinnon report](#) she retorts to Microsoft's decision to remove the blog by saying that "The behaviour of companies like Microsoft, Yahoo and others - and their eager willingness to comply with Chinese government demands - shows a fundamental lack of respect for users and our fundamental human rights. Microsoft, Yahoo and others are helping to institutionalize and legitimize the integration of censorship into the global IT business model." Responses from within Microsoft soon surfaced. Michael Connolly, a product unit manager on MSN Spaces, posted an entry on his personal blog site saying the company had a lot of "complicated issues" that they had to deal with for the removal of this blog. He added that "In China, there is a unique issue for our entire industry: there are certain aspects of speech in China that are regulated by the government. We've made a choice to run a service in China, and to do that, we need to adhere to local regulations and laws. This is not unique to MSN Spaces; this is something that every company has to do if they operate in China." Robert Scoble an avid Microsoft blogger also added his point of view. "Guys over at MSN: Sorry, I don't agree with your being used as a state-run thug," he said. "It's one thing to pull a list of words out of a blog using an algorithm. It's another thing to become an agent of a government and censor an entire blogger's work." Microsoft indeed had to make a tough call - do they keep the blog

going and essentially screw themselves out of the 1.6 billion people market that is China, all the while supporting this notion of *Free Speech*, or do they act like a professional business that's in it for the long haul and think about the potential profits they could make by conceding to the Chinese government's request? It's easy to say that it's a black and white issue and that they're doing it for the money, but there are indeed a lot of things to think about, a lot of scenarios to analyze and a lot of other factors to contemplate. According to Mackinnon and her sources, there's also the possibility that "MSN's takedown of Anti's blog could be the result of dirty politics being played by at least one person at Bokee, China's largest domestically-owned blog hosting company - and naturally, a business rival of MSN spaces." She even goes on and gives an excerpt of the column: *Anti's moving over the MSN is a severely deplorable event in the development of Chinese blogging. By moving his blog to MSN, he will influence a group of others to move their blogs to MSN. Furthermore, we need to reflect: of all the BSP's that Anti has used, how come only MSN was not shut down? Here, we must admire the cunning public relations methods of MSN. We must also think that the Internet supervision departments are negligent about monitoring and controlling blogs, and that they have been lax with respect to MSN. Our bottom line are being backed up step by step, and our market is being eroded step by step. We issue the call: Rise up, and oppose the Microsoft monopoly of 2.0.* The author basically calls for Chinese authorities to put more pressure on MSN to censor Anti. With business motives, government intrusions and the hindrance of freedom of speech, I don't understand how this hasn't turned into a Hollywood director's dream movie. Where's Angelina Jolie to play the *savvy but smart Harvard Law School student who wants to make a change* Rebecca MacKinnon, we can even get Jackie Chan to play Michael Anti and have him Judo-chop the whole Chinese government... While we're at it we could also give Brad Pitt a little cameo scene as Roland Soong, defender of Bloggers for Democracy. I'm not trying to mock what's been happening, but I feel as though something is happening in real life that we typically only see on the big screen and we should open our eyes. An editorial from the New York Times on the same topic recalls the days of the sweat shops in China and how many of the Western companies "cleaned up their acts" to defend human rights in China. "Reporters Without Borders, a group advocating press freedom, recommends that Internet companies also adopt a good conduct code, pledging not to filter out words like 'democracy' and 'human rights' from search engines and maintaining their e-mail and Internet servers outside China." The advantage of the industrywide code of conduct for Internet companies is that it would not put companies at a disadvantage.