



Top 10 Ways to Optimize your Website for China

Companies often make the mistake of assuming that if they place content on a website, the content will be viewable globally. China is a major market for website content with its own particular set of rules. You can make the mistake of going in without knowledge and experience and face having your website get blocked or reduced significantly in efficiency, resulting in a very poor user experience. Or you can optimize your website content for China and make it accessible.

China regulates content. If content is indeed questionable, at a minimum it will take longer to load. At worst, the content will be blocked in China. First you need an ICP license.

1 No ICP, no In-Country Delivery

Any website wishing to enter the China marketing will be required to register for an ICP license. ICP license regulates online content in compliance with China Internet regulatory laws. If content is delivered without an ICP license, it will likely be shut down.

Some companies try to host their delivery in a nearby country or rim delivery such as hosting in Hong Kong. This will not overcome the obstacle. You should use a partner that will be able to handle your ICP requirements.

Carriers within China often will effectively ban competing content. That includes advertisements for competitors. This means that ad placement is a bit more sensitive in China. If a company offer advertising placement to competitors of the carrier on which their traffic flows, they may find that content is not delivered and the purpose of the advertising is thwarted.

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DNS hijacking is also an issue in China. DNS hijacking refers to a user seeking out content on a server, but where they typed in an address, that address is “hijacked” and the content from a different site is delivered back. It is somewhat like going to an address using a GPS and having the GPS route the driver to the neighboring address at the last minute. DNS hijacking normally does not occur with the large data centers. Mid-tier and less expensive DCs do encounter this challenge with some frequency. Therefore, a strong recommendation is to avoid hosting any important content on cheaper providers, where this issue will likely occur.

2 Assign Content to a Unique, China-Dedicated Domain

Do you have a domain or sub-domain that is aimed specifically towards China’s audience? You can continue to use your existing domains as long as you separate out the China-targeted content. It is easier to manage a dedicated domain for Chinese-aimed content.

If you have a domain name such as domainname.com, there are several ways to branch off generic content. First, there is the option of creating domainname.com/china/. However, if your domain has questionable content, this will not help at all, so this is the weakest solution.

Another method would be to create a domain called cn.domainname.com. This also may result in a recurrence of the same issues, as it is still a subdomain scheme based on a root domain that has questionable content. The third and preferred method of providing clean content is to generate a domain like domainname.cn for use within China.

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Changing a domain name is not a substitute for cleaning up content. You still have to take steps to ensure the digital content on the new domain name is appropriate. Be aware of internal links and content that is objectionable regardless of origin.



3 Use Youku, not YouTube

For every non-Chinese application, there is an application made in China that will avoid any potential issues associated with content restrictions. Youku is an example application that can replace use of YouTube. YouTube is problematic because it is an open-content system with free commentary that is hosted outside of China.

4 Non-Native Social Media Links are a Bad Idea

Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus are all examples of global social media. Each presents challenges for presenting content into China. Whether as a platform or as a medium of conversation, the fundamentals are nearly identical.

Facebook and Twitter are both platforms. You can create an account and join into conversations linked by a common theme on either. Anyone can create an account and there is really no guarantee that an account accurately presents user data. In other words, anonymous users can generate bogus accounts.

Twitter and Facebook both allow for the creation of private communities. Private content is not visible to anyone other than members of those private communities. They could offer discussion around politics and this would be private initially, but could be shared with ever-growing communities. People could form anti-government-related interests which could then grow in volume.

Google Plus also allows for the generation of public and private communities. It is a hybrid service that can have similar implications as with other social networking entities. Therefore, the same concerns apply.

Pic.twitter.com deserves mention. It is an image-posting and sharing service similar to Tumblr, which is used by celebrities and businesses in a myriad of contexts related to sales, marketing and similar types of promotion. Businesses often want to post pictures of the products they want to offer.

What is less-commonly known about Twitter is that the global adult industry employs Twitter to promote a plethora of adult content. This includes graphic images of adult entertainers and adult film. China bans pornography and Twitter has a complete ban in China. If you click on a link related to Twitter within China, such as <http://www.twitter.com>, then the link will not work. In fact, the local ISP may hijack the DNS request and instead offer up the search page for <http://baidu.cn>.

Another common mistake is to post a non-China native social media icon without an active link. The icon may not load and could result in site filtering or even a site becoming inaccessible. You should use Chinese Social Media instead.

5 User-Generated Content? No, No and More No

User-generated content is hard to get approved within China. Part of this is due to the lack of predictability. Who will post and what will they post?

User-generated content has to be highly moderated or the moderator could get in trouble. It is a big sin. Why? Because it is far easier to ban content prospectively than guess whether it will comply with strict regulation. It is not worth the trouble for regulating authorities and self-censoring data centers.

Regulators dislike user-generated content. It is a challenge for them to track. Better to avoid it altogether than to risk bans and/or slow loading.



6 Hosted in a Cloud? Keep the Cloud Closer

Cloud hosting is globally prevalent. There are some very large providers, such as Amazon Web Services (“AWS”). AWS hosts sites that are critical of Chinese government policies. Therefore, even if your domain is clean and your content is clean, if your hosting is done within a set of servers with banned content, then this poses a risk.

Hosting within China will mitigate that risk. The servers within China are highly-regulated and are very unlikely to house any questionable content. This is a strongly-recommended strategy.

Leveraging hosting within China should also include obtaining ICP. Obtaining ICP will help ensure your content does not get interrupted nor blocked unnecessarily.

Along with hosting within China, there are also supporting applications to consider. Supporting applications, such as chat for customer service, are an area where there might be issues. There are many strong alternatives available within China.

7 Google Tools Don't Fix Anything

All kinds of Google tools are very popular. Google Maps, Google Fonts, Google Analytics, Google AJAX, among others. They make sites better in many places, but they don't work well in China.

AJAX is available on Google at googleapis.com and fonts are available at fonts.googleapis.com. Why should technology support cause problems in China? And if they do, then what can be done about it?

Any domain including the full word “Google” should be avoided inside of China for the time being. Since these technologies include page layout support, that means the page will not render properly. The user experience will suffer an impact that will likely render it mostly unusable. Google sites should not be used at all.

The use of the term “Google” includes more than technology and more than social networking. It also includes searches and support technologies. Google Analytics is not exempt from restriction.

Google technologies may be blocked entirely, regardless of type. Google Analytics is in use within many organizations to track site activity. There are alternative sources that might be allowed, but there is no general guideline on substitution.

Analytical services provide data that allow for the honing and tracking of online and offline sales and marketing programs. It is a vital service for most organizations. However, it is also a service where links may often be placed at the bottom of a content page, thus allowing for minimal disruption if not loaded.

For all of Google's collateral technologies, there is not necessarily a complete block, but they will be slow in loading and may encounter intermittent timeout errors. For content which requires any Google technology, a best practice is to load any elements at the bottom of the page.

It is a best practice to use an alternative service, especially one available within China. If this is not possible, the tracking code should be placed at the end of the page and the webmaster should be aware of the potential blockage. Beyond the term “Google”, though, there are some other URLs and keywords that will likely cause content issues.

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8 Ads Don't Necessarily Add Up

Third party links can be dangerous. Is your site supported by advertising? How much control do you have over the types of ads that appear?

Risqué or controversial ad content can get your site blocked in a hurry. Linking to AWS, for example, could be enough. As with any other type of content, having the wrong content will either slow down your site or make it become completely unviewable.

Advertising is a variation of user-generated content. Regulators will simply ban the content if they have too much trouble in figuring out what will load. China-based advertising is the safer alternative in this situation.

9 Internal Sites can Get You Blocked, Too

If links on your primary domain point to resources which are themselves questionable, they should be removed. At a minimum, such links might be hijacked and otherwise might result in a site ban. Removing questionable links is an additional necessary step when generating content on a new, clean domain. Examples of trouble sites include Blogspot, Voice of America, or image hosting sites.

Links are not the only type of content that can result in website blockage. There are also hosting providers that offer hosting to sites that are clearly questionable or banned. In that case, the infrastructure itself might become a liability. Even though the link is to China-friendly content, the site could be known to house content hostile to China, which would again result in a ban or block.

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10 Host inside China or Use a Trustworthy CDN

By now you can reach your own conclusion: host inside China or use a trustworthy CDN. Whether you want to get an ICP or have one, there are solid options. Work with ChinaCache to see how to get your site whitelisted to deliver content from within China.

For more information and to take a look at ChinaCache as your gateway to content delivery in China, please visit www.chinacache.com.