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Google blacks out its home page in support of Wikipedia SOPA protest

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This is what Google's home   Brian

Google placed a black redaction box over the logo on its much-visited U.S. home page to draw attention to legislation making its way through the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate that would give companies wide ranging powers to combat online piracy. This comes the same day that Wikipedia blacked itself out in the same protest (the blackout explained below).

The founders of Google, Twitter, Wikipedia, Yahoo! and other Internet giants said in an open letter last month the legislation would give the U.S. government censorship powers "similar to those used by China, Malaysia and Iran."

"We oppose these bills because there are smart, targeted ways to shut down foreign rogue websites without asking American companies to censor the Internet," a Google spokesman said Tuesday.

"So tomorrow we will be joining many other tech companies to highlight this issue on our U.S. home page," the spokesman for the Internet search giant said.

Google's solution allows the search engine giant to keep revenue attached to its searches, while still highlighting the issue.

The move wasn't praised by everyone, however. Key legislators who supported the bill have spoken out against Google.

"This publicity stunt does a disservice to its users by promoting fear instead of facts," said Lamar Smith, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and a sponsor of SOPA. "Perhaps during the blackout, Internet users can look elsewhere for an accurate definition of online piracy."

The homepage appears normally in Canada.

Lost without Wikipedia? The National Post's got you covered. Steve Murray answers your fact-finding inquiries, right now at natpo.st/postipedia
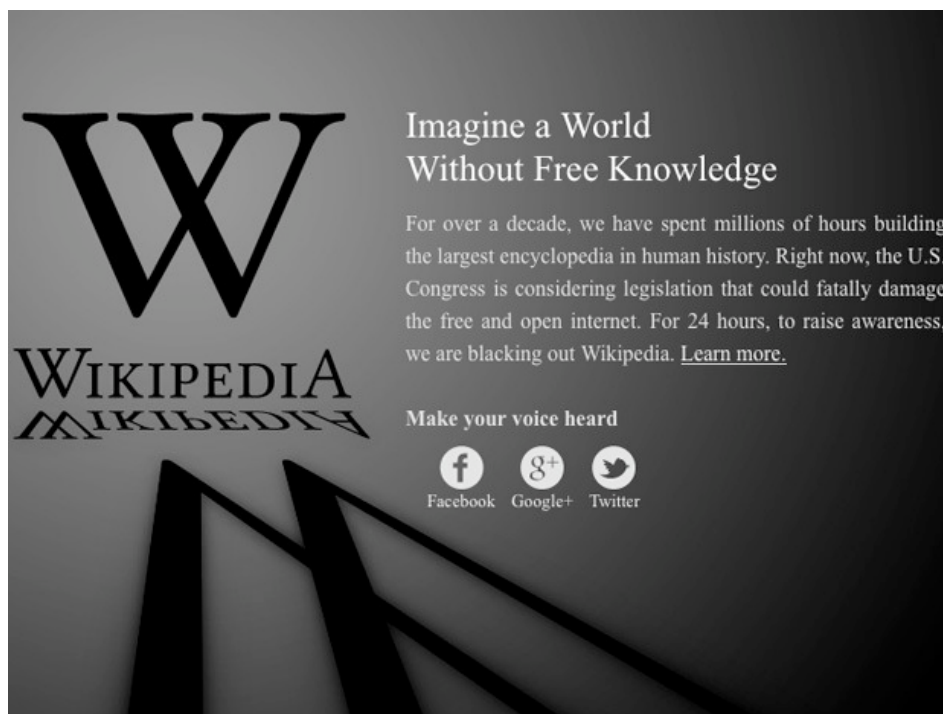
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How long will the Wikipedia be blacked out?
The blackout started at 12:00 a.m. eastern time (5:00 a.m. GMT) on Wednesday morning and will last until 12:00 a.m. eastern time on Thursday (also 5:00 a.m. GMT).

What exactly is blacked out?
The English-language version of Wikipedia is offline and has been replaced with a message related to the anti-piracy legislation going through Congress, SOPA, in the United States. Other language editions of Wikipedia will be unaffected.

Additionally, popular community website Reddit has also gone offline, as well as Boing-Boing and several smaller websites.

WordPress is suggesting users black out their own websites, but is not forcing any blackouts. Google is also staging a homepage protest (see image below).

Whoa, SOPA? What the heck is that?
SOPA, which stands for the Stop Online Piracy Act, is a piece of legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives. The act is designed to target copyright infringers online through a series of harsh penalties.

In the U.S. Senate, a separate companion bill is called the Protect Intellectual Property Act or PIPA.

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Wikipedia goes offline in protest of Internet piracy law

How can I read Wikipedia during the blackout?

What are the battle lines in the debate?
The fight over SOPA is generally seen as a major clash between Hollywood and old media, and Silicon Valley. The backers of the legislation include the Motion Picture Association of America (the MPAA), the major movie studios and television networks, most major book publishers and several ISPs. They say that without the legislation at least 2.2 million industry jobs would be at risk.

A large number of Internet content companies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo! and several others have publicly come out against the

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Internet into a police state.

> **Read more on efforts to change the proposed legislation**:
> 'Three key section of the existing legislation seem likely to remain, a person familiar with the matter says. They comprise provisions aimed at getting search engines to disable links to foreign infringing sites; provisions that cut off advertising services to those sites; and provisions that cut off payment processing.
>
> 'But critical provisions that would require Internet service providers such as Verizon Communications and Comcast Corp. to cut off infringing sites through a technology known as DNS blocking are now likely to be eliminated'

2.2 million jobs sound like a lot. Why do the SOPA opponents say it would turn the Internet into a police state?
Several of the provisions in SOPA force American Internet service providers or ISPs hosting websites to remove a site from the Internet if there's a claim it's infringing against copyright, even if it has not been fully proved in court. The argument is that this would make it easy for someone to make false or weak claims to take a website offline while the case makes its way through the courts.

Additionally, it would force ISPs to block non-U.S. websites accused of having infringing material, meaning sites from other countries might not be available in the United States. Opponents say this might destabilize the Internet and allow loopholes for hackers to exploit.

Which sites that I use would this affect?
Most obviously, Wikipedia. There are millions of users who constantly update the site, and sometimes things are posted that might have questionable copyright provenance. If Wikipedia were shut down or blocked every time it was challenged over copyright, the site would likely cease to function.

YouTube would be another site that would be harshly affected by the measures. Since millions of people upload videos to YouTube, sometimes copyrighted material slips through. Currently, this is dealt with by individual videos being taken down after a complaint. Google has stated YouTube probably wouldn't exist if a SOPA-like law had been in effect in 2004 when the site launched.

Some interpretations of the bill say that sites that even link to other sites accused of infringing might be at risk.

Basically, any site that has a large user-generated component is worried about SOPA. This is the document Wikipedia references when explaining why they are against the bill.

How can I get around the blackout?
If you do a Google search for a Wikipedia page, you should be offered the option to use a "Google Cache" version of the page. This is a past version of the page Google has stored on its own servers.

Doesn't the blackout hurt Wikipedia's reputation as a neutral source of information?
Possibly. On its page explaining the blackout, Wikimedia Foundation Executive Director Sue Gardner had these words: "In making this decision, Wikipedians will be criticized for seeming to abandon neutrality to take a political position. That's a real, legitimate issue. We want people to trust Wikipedia, not worry that it is trying to propagandize them. But although Wikipedia's articles are neutral, its existence is not." Read more about Sue Gardner in a profile on the Canadian-born Wikipedia executive from FP magazine.

Why aren't Google and Facebook blacking out like Wikipedia?
Unlike Wikipedia, which is a not-for-profit, Google and Facebook have a huge number of shareholders to appease.

Google has, however, altered its home and search pages to alert people to the blackout day. This change is only visible in the United States. You can see the company's altered home page on the right and you can read their argument here.

This all sounds pretty bad, why are so many people for it?
The argument is best summed up by News Corp. CEO Rupert Murdoch as posted on Twitter: "Piracy leader is Google who streams movies free, sells advts around them. No wonder pouring millions into lobbying."

Rupert Murdoch
@rupertmurdoch

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Additionally, Robert Bennett, a senior research fellow at a technology think tank and whose work both SOPA and PIPA are based on, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that "The critics either don't understand what the bills do or are misrepresenting what the bills do." Bennett further stated that the bills wouldn't be as far-reaching or sweeping as critics state.

> **Read more on Sue Gardner, Executive Director of the Wikimedia Foundation**:
> 'One of Gardner's initial priorities after taking control of the foundation was identifying the best ways for the organization to sustain growth. At the time, Wikimedia was operating with a staff of just seven people on a shoestring budget of about $1 million. Among her first tasks was helping the foundation move in 2007 from St. Petersburg, Fla., to San Francisco, where it would be in close proximity to the bright minds — and big wallets — of Silicon Valley'

What does the White House have to say about this?
The White House released a statement on the legislation coming out against it, a key point of which was the quote: "We must avoid creating new cybersecurity risks or disrupting the underlying architecture of the Internet."

However, President Barack Obama has not specifically come out and said that he would veto the bill if it came across his desk.

It sounds like people could use this legislation to simply black out speech they don't like.
It isn't that extreme. A complainant would still need to get a court order to shut the site down.

Still … wouldn't that be unconstitutional?
This argument isn't a new one. In fact, the *Stanford Law Review* posted an article in late December basically saying that the entire thing was unconstitutional. Regardless of if the legislation would be struck down in the Supreme Court (and that isn't certain), it would likely take years to push it through the system.

Hasn't the legislation been blocked already?
Support for the bill has fallen through in the House and Senate, and Eric Cantor has stopped work on the bill in the House. While this effectively kills the current iteration of SOPA and PIPA, the bill is still being worked on by its proponents, who wrote a letter to the Senate majority leader asking to keep the bill going. You can read about how the bill is being reformed on the FP Tech Desk.

National Post with files from Reuters and Agence France-Presse

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Anyone keeping track of software/hardware with respect to patents and intellectual property would know that we do not want to go
down the same road with the internet. People can say you still have to get a court order for things, however, court orders are apparently not that
difficult to get in the US. This is a far reaching mechanism that enforces US law on over 20 countries including Canada. This is just a squeeze
game by the media companies to milk more and more from consumers and to get a relatively easy court order to do it.
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"There are millions of users who constantly update the site, and sometimes things are posted that might have questionable copyright
provenance. If Wikipedia were shut down or blocked every time it was challenged over copyright, the site would likely cease to function."

Yes, and if they're not ensuring that legitimate problems are dealt with fairly, whether with copyright concerns or the slant a particular article
takes, using some sources but omitting others with challenging views, then perhaps they do need some higher authority checking up on them.

This what I read about it today - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W... . Quote "Wikipedians spend thousands of hours every week reviewing and
removing infringing content. We are careful about it because our mission is to share knowledge freely. " That's not true. Wikipedians are human
beings with human weaknesses and biases, and the power to decide what gets included in their articles and who gets to contribute. The mission
of the inventor probably was to share knnowledge, but some of the people who work for him may have their own agenda and be quite willing to
use their power in questionable ways.

I'm not sure what the term Wikipedians means, as they use it. I'm talking about the ones who have the power to decide what stays or goes -the
employees, not the normal person trying to make a contribution to truth. In that regard, sometimes Wikipedia fails. Do they need a watchdog? I
have thought so in my experience with them. It's a shame that's how it has turned out, but that's politics. Now they know how I felt when my
work into a subject (Montreal Massacre) was dismissed, while my insights and references themselves still got included, eventually, without any
credit being given to me.
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  johnnymarin > Sue McPherson • a year ago
  You are absolutely correct on Wikipedia being biased. It is all up to the person controlling the specific subject and them allowing
  or disallowing the content. Too much power being given to one person and their inherint biases. Wikipedia is not neutral (although they
  think they are).
  2 △ ⋮ ▽ • Share ›

whitney9 • a year ago
I believe that we have been taking advantage of the weak legislation. I want artists to continue to make money, so I believe in stronger
legislation. We have enjoyed the free ride for too long. This is issue is being discussed at http://whostheass.com/2012/01/...
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