Chinese developers scramble as OpenAI blocks access in China

US firm's move, amid Beijing-Washington tensions, sparks rush to lure users to homegrown models

At the World AI Conference in Shanghai last week, one of China's leading artificial intelligence companies, SenseTime, unveiled its latest model, SenseNova 5.5.

The model showed off its ability to identify and describe a stuffed toy puppy (wearing a SenseTime cap), offered feedback on a drawing of a rabbit, and instantly read and summarised a page of text. According to SenseTime, SenseNova 5.5 is comparable with GPT-4o, the flagship artificial intelligence model of the Microsoft-backed US company OpenAI.

If that wasn't enough to entice users, SenseTime is also giving away 50m free tokens – digital credits for using the AI – and says that it will deploy staff to help new clients migrate from OpenAI services to SenseTime's products for free.

Chinese attempts to lure domestic developers away from OpenAI – considered the market leader in generative AI – will now be a lot easier, after OpenAI notified its users in China that they would be blocked from using its tools and services from 9 July.

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