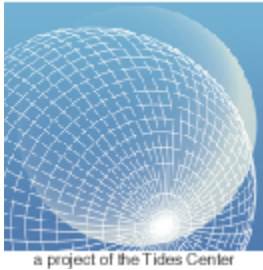


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Pew  
**& Internet**  
American Life  
PROJECT

September 5, 2002

**One year later:**  
**September 11 and the Internet**

Pew Internet Project Survey Analysis:

Lee Rainie, Director

Susannah Fox, Director of Research

Mary Madden, Research Specialist

September 11 Web Archive Analysis:

Steven Schneider, Co-Director WebArchivist.org

Kirsten Foot, Co-Director, WebArchivist.org

Alex Halavais

Adrienne Massanari

Elena Larsen

Erica Siegl

Meghan Dougherty

Pew Internet & American Life Project  
1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW – Suite 710  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
202-296-0019

<http://www.pewinternet.org/>

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## **Summary of Findings**

The most cataclysmic events of the Web era were the 9/11-terror assaults on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the crash of United Airlines Flight 93 in Pennsylvania before it could reach its target in Washington. For tens of millions of Americans, the Internet became a channel for anguished and prayerful gatherings, for heartfelt communication through email, and for vital information.

A year later, the impact of 9/11 is being felt in several ways. First, a survey in July by the Pew Internet & American Life Project shows that even people who favor wide disclosure of information online support government policies to remove that information if officials argue it could aid terrorists. (At least 13 federal agencies and three state governments have removed material from their Web sites, citing concerns about previously posted information that might be useful to terrorists.)

- More than two-thirds of Americans believe that the government should be granted wide privileges in deciding what information to post on government agency Web sites and what information to keep off government sites for fear it will help terrorists. Some 69% of Americans say the government should do everything it can to keep information out of terrorists' hands, even if that means the public will be deprived of information it needs or wants. Similar percentages of Americans approve of officials' steps to remove information from government Web sites that could be useful to terrorists.
- Even those who back the general idea of online disclosure of important information say they would support a government decision to remove that information from the Web if the argument is made that the material could help terrorists. For instance, 60% of those who believe the government should post information about chemical plants and the chemicals they produce say that material should be removed from the Internet if the government said it could help terrorists. And 55% of those who believe the government should post information about nuclear plants say that material should be removed from the Internet if the government said it could help terrorists.
- Though they demonstrate a willingness to cede power to officials over what to disclose online, a plurality of Americans believe that taking government information off the Internet will not make a difference in battling terrorists. Some 47% say that the act of withholding or removing information from government Web sites will not make a difference in deterring terrorists; 41% say that taking information off government Web sites *will* hinder terrorists.
- In addition, citizens are sharply divided on the question of whether the government should be able to monitor people's email and online activities. The opinion breakdown on the question is 47% of Americans believe the government should not have the right to monitor people's Internet use and 45% say the government should have that right. A majority of Internet users oppose government monitoring of people's email and Web activities.

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Second, the Pew Internet Project survey provides evidence about how some Internet users have changed their online behavior in the year since the 9/11 attacks.

- 19 million Americans rekindled relationships after 9/11 by sending email to family members, friends, former colleagues and others that they had not contacted in years. Fully 83% of those who renewed contact with others have maintained those relationships through the past year.
- Notable numbers of American Internet users say they are using email more often, gathering news online more often, visiting government Web sites more often, giving more donations via the Internet, and seeking health and mental health information more often because of the 9/11 attacks.

Third, the survey shows that about a tenth of Americans (11%) feel their lives are still far from normal since the 9/11 events – and of that group, half use the Internet. These hard-hit Americans are more willing than other Internet users to agree with government decisions to remove or withhold information from the Internet. They are also more likely to say they have increased their use of email because of the terror attacks.

These are among the highlights of the Pew Internet Project survey. At the same time, this report draws upon another kind of research to explore the impact of 9/11 on the people and organizations that create the Web. Using material cached in an archive of nearly 30,000 Web sites that were identified and monitored in the weeks after 9/11, a team of researchers led by Steven M. Schneider of the State University of New York Institute of Technology, and Kirsten Foot of the University of Washington, has begun the first systematic study of how the content and structure of the Web changed in the period after the attacks.

Among the key findings of this analysis of the Web:

***The Web was dominated by reactions to 9/11 events***

The rapid development of new content and features on the Web affected how many Americans responded to the September 11 attacks by providing structures through which they could obtain information, provide assistance, share their reactions, and convey their policy preferences to government bodies.

In a cross-sectional sample of Web sites produced by organizations and individuals:

- 63% provided information related to the attacks
- 36% allowed visitors to provide some form of assistance to victims
- 26% allowed individuals to seek assistance from others and from relief organizations

Many sites adapted rapidly to the crisis. Government Web sites retooled quickly to allow individuals to provide tips in the terrorism investigations and to help people find means to provide assistance to victims and their families. Religious, educational, and personal sites were particularly active in helping people provide assistance to others or obtain

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assistance. By contrast, very few Web sites enabled political advocacy (e.g. signing a petition, or communicating policy preferences to government officials).

### ***The rise of do-it-yourself journalism***

The 9/11 attacks and their aftermath generated the most traffic to traditional news sites in the history of the Web. Equally as important was the fact that many non-news sites were turned into conduits for information, commentary, and action related to 9/11 events.

Do-it-yourself journalism has been a staple of Internet activity for years and the terrorist attacks gave new prominence to the phenomenon. In the days after the attacks, the Web provided a broad catalog of facts and fancy related to 9/11, ranging from eyewitness accounts from New York, Washington, and across the nation, to government reports, to analysis from experts and amateurs. With the eyes of the world focused on a small number of related events, many stepped into the role of amateur journalist, seeking out sources and sometimes assembling these ideas for others. Most striking, perhaps, were the wide number of accounts from those who had seen the World Trade Center collapse, or had in some way gained first-hand knowledge of surrounding events. Beyond that, many people posted their reactions to 9/11. At some sites these accounts, pictures and commentary were compiled and cataloged by Web producers outside the channels of traditional journalism.

### ***Government sites***

These sites became important clearinghouses of information for those directly or indirectly affected by the attacks, individuals interested in donating to the relief efforts, and the agencies' own employees, who, in some cases, were victims of the attacks or the later anthrax scares. Some government sites highlighted the historical roots of terrorism and tried to place the attacks in some sort of political context. Few, however, entered into a dialogue with their visitors about the issues underlying the events of September 11, and fewer still encouraged individuals to offer their own opinions as to what response should be taken.

- 76% of government sites provided information about the 9/11 attacks, agency responses to it, and how people themselves could take action
- 28% of these sites had information about how people could get assistance and 19% of them allowed people to provide assistance
- 21% of the sites allowed people to express their opinions and reactions to the attacks
- None provided features for citizens to advocate for specific U.S. policy responses

### ***Religious sites***

The most common needs addressed on 22 denominational sites were the physical and financial needs of the immediate victims of the attacks and their families. The denominations have their own standing relief mechanisms in place, so were able to organize their own relief efforts. Denominations also used their Web sites to respond to the needs of church members themselves. The most extensive collections of links available on the denominational sites sought to provide spiritual and emotional assistance

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to members dealing with the aftermath of the attacks. Some sites provided linked sections where visitors could get a brief introduction to Islam. However, the denominational sites did not attempt to provide much material related to visitors deep theological questions, such as: Why does God permit evil?

### ***The Web as a public commons***

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the Internet provided a virtual public space where grief, fear, anger, patriotism and even hatred could be shared. For those whose only contact with the attacks came through a television set, the Internet provided a way to connect emotionally with a virtual community whose ties were not geographic, but bounded by common experience. While the expression posted to the Web in response to the attacks spanned the range of human emotion, the most prominent were:

- Expressions of sadness, grief and condolences, which appeared on 75% of the Web sites that allowed Internet users to post comments
- Expressions of religious and spiritual thoughts, which appeared on 61% of such sites
- Expressions of anger, fear, and hate, which appeared on 52% of such sites
- Expressions of shock and disbelief, which appeared on 48% of such sites
- Expressions of patriotism, which appeared on 46% of such sites

### ***The images that dominated the Web***

Some 38% of the Web sites examined in a sample from the September 11 archive ran images of 9/11 events in the days and weeks after the attack. Six distinct types of images dominated the online environment:

- Informative images – many of which were first captured in news of the attacks
- Memorial images – which were often used to acknowledge the tragedy and show support for victims and rescuers
- Signpost images – which were images placed on all kinds of Web sites to show recognition of the importance of 9/11 events even though the function of those Web sites was unrelated to news or memorials (such as e-commerce sites)
- Storytelling images – which often were bunched together to show how certain elements of the 9/11 story were unfolding
- Supplemental images – which often accompanied heartfelt written commentary about the meaning of the attacks or the appropriate way to respond to them
- Logos – which were designed to capture some emotional aspect of a Web designer's response to the ongoing story.

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## **Part 1**

### **How the terror attacks affected Americans' views about online information and their Internet use**

**By the staff of the Pew Internet & American Life Project**

#### ***Introduction and background***

The September 11 terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were the most seismic news events in the Web era. They dominated people's thoughts and their actions online like no other event before them.

One of the most important and potentially long-term impacts of the 9/11 events and their aftermath is how they compelled government officials and ordinary Americans to consider what kinds of information should be made available online. As a rule, and in many cases by the dictates of law, much of the information that government collects about American manufacturers, utilities, and transportation firms is made public. But after 9/11, the creators of various government Web sites chose to remove sensitive information that could potentially be useful to terrorists. This included information such as emergency response plans for chemical plants, GIS data, detailed maps and descriptions of nuclear facilities, reports on chemical transportation security, and information on water supplies. According to information gathered by OMB (Office of Management and Budget) Watch, a non-profit that promotes government accountability ([www.ombwatch.org](http://www.ombwatch.org)), 13 government agencies and three state Web sites have prevented access to information that was previously available to the public online:

- The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry—removed a report on security at chemical plants
- Bureau of Transportation Statistics—most Geographic Information Services were made unavailable
- Department of Energy—removed various maps, reports, Web sites, databases relating to nuclear facilities or liquefied gas fuel dangers
- Department of Transportation—discontinued access to the National Pipeline Mapping System
- Environmental Protection Agency—restricted access to Web sites, Envirofacts databases, emergency chemical exposure guidelines and assessments, risk management plans, facility floor plans and maps
- The Federal Aviation Administration—removed the Enforcement Information System database
- The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission—made specifications on energy facilities unavailable
- Internal Revenue Service—removed page that contained information for IRS employees displaced as a result of 9/11
- The National Archives and Records Administration—discontinued access to some archival materials
- NASA Glenn Research Center—restricted public access to its website



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- The National Imagery and Mapping Agency—stopped the sale of large-scale digital maps as well as the downloading of maps from its archives
  - The Nuclear Regulatory Commission—took down its Web site
  - The U.S. Geological Survey—removed multiple reports on water resources
  - The State of Florida—prevented access to information on crop dusters and certain driver’s license information
  - The State of New Jersey—removed chemical storage information
  - The State of Pennsylvania<sup>1</sup>—withheld certain environmental information

In addition, *The Washington Post* reported on October 4, 2001 that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, housed under the Department of Health and Human Services, removed a report on chemical terrorism from their Web site.<sup>2</sup>

These actions coincided with a memorandum issued on October 12, 2001 by the Attorney General, John Ashcroft, that urged federal departments and agencies to “carefully consider” the disclosure of sensitive information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and assured them that any decisions to withhold records would be defended by the Department of Justice unless they “lack a sound legal basis.”<sup>3</sup> Such exemptions from the FOIA were also encouraged in a memo issued by White House Chief of Staff, Andrew Card, on March 19, 2002, that called for an immediate re-evaluation of any classified, reclassified, declassified or “sensitive but unclassified” material whose disclosure could prove to be harmful.<sup>4</sup>

In some cases, these assessments resulted in the removal of isolated documents; in others, it meant shutting down entire Web sites. The U.S. Geological survey, for example, pulled several reports on water resources from its Web site, while the Web site for the National Transportation of Radioactive Materials at the Department of Energy was completely removed.<sup>5</sup> Although some information on agency Web sites was only removed temporarily, much information has remained restricted.

Our survey from June 26 to July 26, 2002 found that just 25% of the public (28% of Internet users) were aware that government agencies had pulled information from Web sites. And only 5% of Internet users said they had noticed that information they expected

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<sup>1</sup> A full explanation for the type of information withdrawn from each site can be found at: <http://www.ombwatch.org/article/articleview/213/1/104/>

<sup>2</sup> Gugliotta, Guy. “Agencies Scrub Web Sites Of Sensitive Chemical Data.” *Washington Post* 4 Oct. 2001: A29. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A2738-2001Oct3&notFound=true>

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Justice Office of Information and Privacy FOIA Post. New Attorney General FOIA Memorandum Issued. 12 Oct. 2001. 27 Aug. 2002. Available at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/foiapost/2001foiapost19.htm>

<sup>4</sup> United States Department of Justice Office of Information and Privacy FOIA Post. Guidance on Homeland Security Information Issued. 19 March 2002. 27 Aug. 2002. Available at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/foiapost/2002foiapost10.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Office of Management and Budget Watch. Access to Government Information Post September 11<sup>th</sup>. 3 May 2002. 26 Aug. 2002. Available at: <http://www.ombwatch.org/article/articleview/213/1/104/>

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to be on a government Web site was missing. Nonetheless, Americans have definite views about what government agencies should and should not do with sensitive information on their Web sites.

***Americans' views about what government agencies should post online***

Citizens are willing to give their government wide leeway in deciding what information to provide on agency Web sites if officials argue that information might be useful to terrorists. More than two-thirds (69%) say the government should do everything it can to keep information out of terrorists' hands, even if that means the public will be deprived of information it needs or wants. A quarter of Americans believe otherwise: 24% say Americans have a right to information from their own government even if that information could be helpful to terrorists. Following from that, 67% of Americans believe the government should remove information from its Web sites that might potentially help terrorists, even if the public has a right to know that information. Similarly, two-thirds of Americans believe businesses and utilities should not put information that might help terrorists on their Web sites.

Yet even as they express a willingness to cede power over what to disclose to government officials, a distinct plurality of Americans believe that taking government information off the Internet will not make a difference in battling terrorists. Some 47% say that the act of withholding or removing information from government Web sites will not make a difference in deterring terrorists; 41% say that taking information off government Web sites *will* hinder terrorists. Some 12% of Americans are uncertain whether those acts will help or not.

Citizens are sharply and evenly divided on the question of whether the government should be able to monitor people's email and online activities. By a 47%-45% margin, Americans believe the government should not have the right to monitor people's Internet use. There was a distinct split between Internet users and non-users in answering that question. Internet users opposed such monitoring by a 9-point margin, and non-users supported the idea of government monitoring by a 10-point margin.

Should the government be able to monitor people's email and online activities?			
	<i>All Americans</i>	<i>Internet users</i>	<i>Non-users</i>
Yes	45%	43%	49%
No	47%	52%	39%
Don't know/ refused to answer	8%	5%	12%

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Survey, June 26-July 26, 2002. N=2,501. Margin of error is ±2%.*

In general, Americans have different views about the value of different kinds of information on government Web sites. They generally support the idea of the government providing information about clearcut, immediate threats – for instance, pollution and sex

offenders – and about information that is important to the political process such as campaign contributions. But they are much more wary of the government providing information that seems personal (property tax records, marriage and divorce records) or that might aid people who are planning to do harm.

What should be posted on government sites			
Type of information	Percent of all Americans who say it should be posted	Internet users	Non-users
Information about pollution that individual factories cause	80%	87%	71%
Names of people who have been convicted of sex offenses who have finished their time in prison	76%	79%	71%
Lists of campaign contributions to political candidates	69%	76%	57%
Lists of chemical plants and the chemicals they produce	43%	50%	34%
Information about how and when hazardous materials are transported *	38%	37%	39%
Information about nuclear plants	32%	38%	22%
Property tax records, such as what people paid for their houses	27%	34%	17%
Marriage and divorce records	27%	30%	22%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Survey, June 26-July 26, 2002. N=2,501. Margin of error is  $\pm 2\%$ .

\* Question was asked of 1,250 Americans. Margin of error is  $\pm 3\%$ .

We pressed those who favored disclosure about some kinds of information whether their views would change if the government argued that this information could help terrorists. Many then supported the idea that such information should be removed from the Internet:

- 60% of those who originally believed the government should post information about chemical plants and the chemicals they produce said that material should be removed from the Internet if the government said it could help terrorists.
- 55% of those who originally believed the government should post information about nuclear plants said that material should be removed from the Internet if the government said it could help terrorists.
- 54% of those who originally believed the government should post information about the pollution caused by individual factories said that material should be removed from the Internet if the government said it could help terrorists.

#### ***The difference when information relates to things close to home***

We asked some of our respondents whether it would be a good thing or a bad thing to have information posted on the Internet about how and when hazardous materials are transported through their communities. By a nearly 3-2 margin (57%-34%) they said it

would be a good thing to post such material and there was very little difference in the beliefs of Internet users and non-users.

However, those who generally think such material is important to their community and belongs online relinquish that position if the government makes the case that terrorists might be aided. Some 58% of those who originally believed the government should post information about the transportation of hazardous materials through their community say that material should be removed from the Internet if the government said it could help terrorists.

### ***What Internet users have changed in their online behavior***

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have influenced the way that some people use the Internet to communicate with others and to gather information from key online resources.

Overall, modest but notable numbers of Internet users say they are using email more often, gathering news online more often, seeking online health information and mental health information more often, visiting government Web sites more frequently, and making online donations more often, at least in part as a response to events of 9/11. For some Americans, the attacks were a major reason for their changed online behavior – especially by groups who say they are getting more news online, going to government Web sites more often, and making more online donations. For others, the attacks were a minor reason for their changed behavior – that is particularly true for those seeking health information.

Changes in key online activities in the wake of 9/ 11			
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Percentage of Internet users who have ever performed this activity online</i>	<i>Percentage of those who have done this activity who now report they do it more frequently since Sept. 11, 2001</i>	<i>Percentage of those who have changed their level of activity who cite the Sept. 11 attacks as a major reason for the change</i>
Send or read email	93% (105 million American adults)	13%	15% (2 million)
Get news	66% (75 million American adults)	32%	43% (10 million)
Get health information	64% (72 million American adults)	9%	14% (1 million)
Use government agency web sites	62% (70 million American adults)	17%	32% (4 million)
Get mental health information	23% (26 million American adults)	12%	23% (700,000)
Make donations online	7% (8 million American adults)	26%	72% (1.5 million)

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Survey, June 26-July 26, 2002. N (Internet users)=1,527. Margin of error is ±3%.

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These patterns of increased Internet use in some activities also reflect broader trends we have seen in online behavior we have charted separately and apart from 9/11. Our July 2002 survey shows increases in most of these online activities, compared to survey data gathered last fall.

***19 million used email to re-establish relations with family members, old friends, and colleagues***

The September 11 crisis spurred a significant number of Internet users to reconnect with old friends, family members, and colleagues from their past. One in six email users (17%) report that in the weeks after the terror attacks they sent an email to someone with whom they had not been in contact for several years. That amounts to 19 million American adults who used email to reestablish connection with someone important from their past. And the vast majority (83%) of those who reached out have maintained their ties to those long-lost companions from their past.

Online women were 40% more likely than men to have reached out via email to long-lost friends, family, and former colleagues. And the heaviest Internet users, those who are online daily, were more likely than less fervent Internet users to have used email to track down companions from their past.

***The impact of 9/11 on overall Internet use***

A small fraction of Internet users (2%) say the amount of time they go online has been directly affected in a major way by the 9/11 attacks and they are evenly divided between those who say the attacks have prompted them to go online more and those who say the attacks have provoked them to go online less.

Since the attacks, about 8 million more Americans have gone online for the first time and the overall number of adult Americans who use the Internet has grown to 113 million.

***Life is “far from normal” for 11% of Americans***

Many Americans, both Internet users and non-users alike, think the country suffered a grievous blow on September 11. Virtually half the nation (49%) thinks the country has changed a great deal since the attacks and another 34% say the country has changed some. At a personal level, 17% of Americans say their own life has changed a great deal since the attacks, and another 33% say their own life changed some. In sum, half of Americans say their own lives were changed a year ago at least to some noticeable degree.

The majority of those who say their own lives were dramatically affected at the time of the attacks are still coping with the change. In all, 11% of Americans say that life is still far from normal since the 9/11 attacks. Of that group, half use the Internet.

Compared to other Internet users, these hard-hit Americans are more likely than other Internet users to have used email, instant messaging, and Web sites to connect to their

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family, their friends. Hard-hit Americans are also more likely than other groups to say email should be monitored if it would prevent future terrorist attacks.

Americans who say life is far from normal are more likely to be older than those who say life is back to normal. African-Americans are 70% more likely than whites to report that life has not gotten back to normal for them, and Hispanics are 40% more likely to report a significant long-term impact on themselves than whites are. Hard-hit Americans – Internet users and non-users alike – are more likely to live in an urban area and in the South than those who say life is back to normal. Otherwise, they reflect the overall population – half of these hard-hit respondents are men and half are women. They are no more likely than other respondents to be living in wealthy or poor households, to be Democrats or Republicans, or to be employed or unemployed.

The hard-hit respondents who go online are more intense in their use of some key communication tools. Internet users who say life is far from normal are more likely to use the Internet on a typical day (60%, compared to 53% of those whose lives are back to normal) and more likely to send email on a typical day (55%, compared to 47% of those whose lives are back to normal). They are also more likely to say that they email more frequently since the 9/11 attacks and that the events are a reason for this increased activity.

In the days following 9/11, 30% of hard-hit Internet users sent email to people they had not been in contact with for several years, compared to 14% of Internet users who say life is back to normal. Of those who sent emails last September, 90% of hard-hit respondents say they are still in touch with those people through email or in other ways, compared to 79% of respondents who say life is back to normal.

Hard-hit Americans are more likely than other groups to say they plan to take part in almost every form of 9/11 remembrance – watching television specials, going to services, reading special magazine or newspaper issues. Their desire to fly the American flag is equaled by other groups. Hard-hit Americans with Internet access are more likely than other groups to say they plan to email family and friends, visit Web sites devoted to 9/11, and to read and exchange thoughts with other people online.

Those who say life is far from normal are more likely than others to back government decisions to remove information from the Internet. And 52% of hard-hit Americans think the government should monitor email to prevent terrorism, compared to 43% of those who say their lives are back to normal (and 45% of all Americans).

***Some Internet users now do things online instead of performing offline activities***

About a tenth of Internet users say they have started doing some things online that they would have done offline before the terror attacks occurred. The list is compiled in the table below:

Some use online tools now, rather than doing some things offline		
Activity	Percent of Internet users who say they have done this since Sept. 11, 2001	Percent of Internet users who say they have done this at least partially because of the terror attacks or anthrax scare
Sent an email rather than a letter or a card	33%	5%
Shopped online rather than going to the mall	20%	2%
Worked from home rather than going to the office	7%	2%
Participated in a video conference rather than travel to a meeting	4%	2%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Survey, June 26-July 26, 2002. N (Internet users)=1,527. Margin of error is  $\pm 3\%$ .

### ***How Americans plan to commemorate 9/11***

The first anniversary of the terror attacks will be a national time of mourning, solemn patriotism, and policy debate. Virtually every American plans to do something to remember the events of 9/11, honor the victims, and/or pay tribute to those involved in the rescue and recovery work. Some plan to perform acts of civic participation, too.

Asked about several possible activities they could perform on the first anniversary of the attacks, Internet users say they are very likely to do something, but their remembrance activities are *more* likely to be things they do offline than things they do online. Here are the things U.S. Internet users say they are very likely to do in the days surrounding the anniversary:

- 70% of Internet users say they will fly the American flag at home or work
- 44% of Internet users say they will watch television specials about 9/11
- 35% of Internet users say they will read special issues of magazines or newspapers related to 9/11
- 25% of Internet users say they will attend religious services, community services, or memorials related to 9/11
- 22% of Internet users say they will send email to friends or family about 9/11
- 12% of Internet users say they will visit commemorative Web sites
- 10% of Internet users say they will go to Web sites to read others' opinions on the anniversary
- 5% of Internet users say they will post their own thoughts about the anniversary on a Web site bulletin board, in a chat room, or on an email listserv

### ***Methodology***

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates between June 26 and July 26, 2002, among a sample of 2,501 adults, 18 and older. For results based on the total sample, one can say

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with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based on Internet users (n=1,527), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid “listing” bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. Additionally, the sample was released in replicates to make sure that the telephone numbers called are distributed appropriately across regions of the country. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at every household in the sample. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Interview refusals were recontacted at least once in order to try again to complete an interview. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day. The response rate on this survey was 38%.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted by form in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (March 2001). This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.



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## **Part 2**

### **The Web after September 11**

**By Steven M. Schneider**  
**SUNY Institute of Technology, College of Arts and Sciences**  
**Kirsten A. Foot**  
**University of Washington, Department of Communication**  
**Co-Directors, WebArchivist.org**

**A “Webscape” of examples for this section can be found at:**  
**<http://september11.archive.org/webscape/sch/>**

#### ***Key Findings***

The rapid development of new content and features on the Web affected how many Americans responded to the September 11 attacks by providing structures through which they could obtain and provide information and assistance, share their reactions, and convey their policy preferences to governmental bodies.

The creation of online structures facilitated both online and offline actions by Web users. Of 247 Web sites produced by a variety of organizations and individuals:

- 63% provided information related to the attacks
- 36% allowed visitors to provide some form of assistance to victims
- 26% allowed individuals to seek assistance from others and from relief organizations

While many Americans relied on television to provide up-to-the-minute news, the actions enabled by the Web demonstrate its importance as a component of the public sphere, and a resource in a time of crisis. It also demonstrated the importance of Webmasters’ ability to adapt existing site elements and create new site features.

- Government Web sites retooled quickly to allow individuals to provide tips in the terrorism investigations and to help people find means to provide assistance to victims and their families.
- Religious, educational, and personal sites were particularly active in helping people both provide and obtain assistance.
- By contrast, very few Web sites enabled political advocacy (e.g. signing a petition, or communicating policy preferences to government officials).

The actions enabled by Web sites after 9/ 11			
<i>What Internet users could do at these sites related to 9/ 11 events</i>	<i>The percent of all sites that allowed this action</i>	<i>The types of sites that most commonly contained this structure</i>	<i>The types of sites that least commonly contained this structure</i>
Get direct, specific information about 9/ 11 events	63%	News, government, educational	Charity, religious
Access expressions of others	55%	Personal, educational	Government
Offer personal expression	44%	Personal, news, educational	Religious, business
Provide assistance	36%	Religious, government, personal, educational, portal	Advocacy, business
Get assistance	26%	Educational, religious, personal	Business, advocacy, portal
Provide information	11%	Educational, government	Advocacy, religious
Advocate	6%	Advocacy	All other types

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project analysis of 247 sites from the September 11 Web Archive.

Adaptive and interactive features on many kinds of Web sites made it easier for people to obtain and provide various kinds of information and assistance both online and offline, as well as to share their response to the attacks with others, and to lobby for political action.

In sum, the Web was a significant component of the public sphere, enabling coordination, information-sharing, assistance, expression and advocacy in a crisis situation. In addition, these findings demonstrate the value of Webmasters and other content producers as resources to be deployed in a time of crisis.

### ***Introduction***

The terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001, stimulated intense and widespread reactions by many around the world. It is well known that online traffic picked up dramatically at many Web sites produced by news and government organizations, search engines, and portals. The increased traffic to high-profile sites was only part of the story, though. In an article posted on News.com the afternoon of September 11, Stefanie Olsen noted that within hours of the attacks individual New Yorkers and others around the world created personal Web sites as well as used email and chat applications to check in with each other. She also reported on the immediate change in several New York corporate Web sites – including Marriot Hotels, Morgan Stanley, and the law firm of Sidley Austin Brown and Wood – to report on the status of employees and visitors. Prodigy Communication created a National “I’m Okay” Message Center, <http://okay.prodigy.net/>, designed to help people locate friends and family with whom they had lost contact during the attacks.

Writer Reid Goldsborough argued that television “trumped” the Internet in delivering breaking news in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. But he noted that the Web provided several distinct advantages over television: The Web had more depth of information from a greater number of perspectives, including international ones, archives

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of visual images, and more first-hand accounts through personal Web sites or blogs and online discussion groups. “Perhaps what’s most valuable about the personal nature of the Internet [in a crisis] is its capacity for community-building,” Goldsborough maintained. “During a disaster, it’s a natural human impulse to reach out to others, and the Internet is nonpareil in bridging the distance that often separates us.”

Lucy Fisher and Hugh Porter, writing a week after the attacks, catalogued some of the ways that Web producers immediately responded to the events. Their list of producer actions included the creation by hackers of mirrors of news sites to help Web users gain quicker access to breaking news, the posting by the producers of professional psychology associations of guidance on handling emotional distress and talking with children about the attacks, and the blacking out of Web sites around the world by many kinds of producers, temporarily replacing their sites’ regular content with “a picture, a message, or a list of other sites doing the same.” Some site producers – especially news organizations such as CNN.com and MSNBC.com – turned to content delivery networks such as Akamai to handle the dramatically increased demand for content. Major search engines and portals reworked their approaches to serving Web users. Google, for example, transformed itself from a pure search tool to something closer to a destination or portal site, a significant departure from its carefully cultivated strategic positioning.

This report analyzes how the Web itself changed in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The primary aim is to examine how many Web producers created new kinds of Web sites and online activities, and how other Web producers changed their existing Web sites to respond to the cataclysmic news. This report also explores how those changes in much of the content of the Web were embraced and exploited by online Americans. At one level, this study is meaningful because it explores how pliable and fecund Web content can be – and how useful that is to those who access the Internet. At another level, it is important to explore how the creation of new online material – much of it encouraging civic participation, political debate, and policy advocacy – can affect the behavior and attitudes of Internet users.

Did all the ferment on the Web encourage political activity and civic engagement? Our argument is that the changes in the content, features and structure of the Web probably were a factor for some Americans in shaping their response to the events of 9/11 and beyond.

### ***Methods***

This report is based on two independently collected data streams: an archive of Web sites related to September 11, and a series of daily telephone surveys of individuals about their online behavior in the days and weeks following the terrorist attacks.

Our study of the behavior of site producers, and the structures they created to enable online actions, comes from an analysis of Web sites archived between September 11, 2001 and December 1, 2001. During this time, the authors worked with the Pew Internet and American Life Project, the U.S. Library of Congress, the Internet Archive and volunteers from around the world to identify and archive URLs that were likely to be

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relevant to the question of how Web site producers were reacting to the events of September 11 (<http://september11.archive.org/>).

The analysis presented here is based on an examination of Web sites produced by nine types of groups: 1) news organizations such as CNN, the New York Times and Salon.com; 2) federal, state and local government agencies; 3) corporations and other commercial organizations; 4) advocacy groups; 5) religious groups, including denominations and congregations; 6) individuals acting on their own behalf; 7) educational institutions; 8) portals, and 9) charity and relief organizations.

The archive was created by performing systematic searches for URLs produced by these sets of actors. Links to other URLs were followed to find more sites with relevant content. In most cases, the salient feature of these sites was content referring to the attacks and/or their aftermath. In some cases, the absence or removal of such content was salient. These collection efforts identified nearly 29,000 different “sites.” Each site was archived on a daily basis from initial identification some time between September 11 and mid-October until December 1, 2001.

The objective of the archiving activity was to preserve not only the bits and the content, but also the actions and experiences that were enabled by each site. By capturing pages and sites along with their links to other sites, the archiving tools preserved an interlinked Web sphere, characterized and bounded by a shared object orientation to the September 11 attacks. The sampling strategy for this study was designed to include a broad representation of site producers and to focus on those sites that were added to the archive soon after September 11. It yielded a sample of three “impressions” or site captures of the different Web sites. A preliminary analysis of the site pages eliminated those without content relevant to the September 11 events, as well as those not captured in a readable format by the archiving tools. These methods resulted in a pool of 247 intact, coded sites that could be used for analysis. This refined sample of Web sites was then examined closely by trained observers to assess the range of actions made possible by site producers.

Our analysis of the behavior and attitudes of Internet users comes from daily surveys by the Pew Internet and American Life project in the six weeks following September 11. The surveys employed random digit dialing to reach adults across the continental United States. The data were then weighted according to a special analysis of the March 2002 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey to account for non-response bias in telephone surveys.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Online structure for action***

Online structures enable online and offline actions. Online survivor databases, for example, allowed those in the area of the World Trade Center to broadcast their status globally, and provided a tool for many to look for missing loved ones in hospitals and other venues. Our analysis suggests that the seven different kinds of online structures

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<sup>6</sup> For more details see the methodology section in Part 1 of this report, authored by the staff of the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

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were created in the wake of 9/11 events and that facilitated seven kinds of activities by Internet users: (1) getting information; (2) providing information; (3) getting assistance/support; (4) providing assistance/support; (5) allowing personal expression; (6) accessing others' expression; and (7) engaging in political advocacy. Here is a more detailed description of what we found, in order of how prevalent the content was on the Web sites we examined:

### *Getting information*

Almost two-thirds of the Web sites we examined (63%) provided direct and specific information about 9/11 events and the continuing and sprawling news developments that followed. On these sites visitors could obtain news and information about the terrorist attacks, and the subsequent rescue and recovery operations, civic response, criminal investigations, military response, terrorism in historic and political context, etc. Content associated with this action included news, information, and photographs produced by professional (for profit) organizations, nonprofit organizations, and individuals (amateurs). News organizations' Web sites and government agency Web sites were the ones that most commonly enabled this action – almost all of them did so. In addition, a significant proportion of educational sites (76%) also allowed it.

### *Accessing others' expression*

More than half of these Web sites (55%) contained some personal views and opinions of the sites' creators. These sites provided visitors with opportunities to examine others' responses to the attacks. Memorial sites, typically created by individuals and educational institutions, and personal blogs, were the sites that facilitated the user action of accessing thoughts and emotions expressed by others on the Web most frequently. Significant numbers of corporate, news and religious sites enabled this action as well.

### *Offering personal expression*

More than four in ten Web sites (44%) allowed visitors not only to view others' expression, but also to post their own reactions and perspectives about the terrorist attacks, the subsequent rescue and recovery operations, and governmental and civic response. This category also includes the expression of religious and spiritual views. In addition, this type of action includes the capacity for site visitors to join in communal expressions of grief and mourning, e.g. by lighting a virtual candle or adding a message to an electronic condolence book. Some sites which had existed prior to the attacks but had not previously allowed site visitors to contribute to the site developed new features in the weeks after September 11 that enabled personal expression. For instance, some government and corporate sites which had previously restricted site visitors to obtaining information, created new online structures after the attacks by which visitors could post responses. Personal Web sites, news sites, educational sites, and the sites of charitable organizations were the ones that most commonly facilitated this action.

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### *Providing assistance*

More than a third of these Web sites (36%) provided online structure that enabled their visitors to assist victims, and the families and friends of victims. These sites facilitated action in support of various public and private relief work, such as rescue and recovery efforts, counseling, education, criminal investigations, community organizing, and solidarity-building activities. They also allowed people to contribute money to relief efforts; offer help to community organizers, service providers and educators; and obtain symbolic merchandise (flags, shirts, etc.) and content (images, songs, texts) facilitating participation in solidarity-building efforts. A surprisingly wide range of sites enabled this kind of action, including portals, educational sites, personal Web sites, religious sites, charitable sites, and government agency sites.

### *Getting assistance*

One in four Web sites (26%) carried features or content that made it easier for survivors and the families of victims to obtain the help they needed, e.g. in locating missing persons or registering for various forms of longer-term assistance. Some of the Web-based services provided information for those in the immediate vicinity of the attacks; others provided or sought information about individuals who were in the immediate vicinity. Examples of these services included registries of victims, lists of those missing in the attacks, lists of survivors (“I’m okay” sites), and resource and referral directories. Government sites and educational sites were the ones that most commonly enabled this action.

### *Providing information*

About a tenth of these Web sites (11%) enabled Internet users to contribute newsworthy information to the site. For example, individuals were able to provide “tips” to authorities related to the investigation of the terrorist, and later the anthrax, investigations. Other sites enabled individuals to post information about the attacks and the rescue/recovery operations that were underway. The sites that most commonly facilitated this action were educational sites and government sites.

### *Political advocacy*

Finally, 6% of these sites allowed users to engage in political advocacy by conveying their policy preferences to government officials. For example, individuals could sign online petitions, send email to government representatives, read or post policy positions in online discussion groups, or contribute money to interest and advocacy groups that were lobbying for particular forms of political action. Unsurprisingly, the Web sites of advocacy groups were the most common online structure for this action. Many sites combined two forms of online structure: They allowed users to engage in certain actions “on-site” and they also linked to other sites where other kinds of action were possible. We refer to this latter form of structure as “coproduced,” and note that

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coproduction through links allowed Web site producers to expand the number of actions they were facilitating.

Seventy percent of the sites that facilitated providing assistance did so via coproduction; 80% of the sites that allowed visitors to access expression, and 75% of the sites that allowed visitors to provide expression, did so on-site. Personal sites were much more likely to coproduce online structure than any other type of site producer. Business and advocacy producers were much less likely to do so. Advocacy, religious, educational and business producers were most likely to produce on-site structure to facilitate online action by their site visitors.

### ***Online actions by Internet users***

It is important to remember that the online activities by Internet users after September 11 were usually part of a larger number of things they did to learn about events and respond to them. Pew Internet & American Life surveys at the time showed, for instance, that Internet users were avid television watchers and newspaper consumers – more so than non-Internet users.

The Pew Internet Project surveys also showed that many Americans – Internet users and nonusers were responding in some personal way to the attacks. We asked respondents if they had engaged in any of five different offline activities related to September 11: attended a religious service, tried to donate blood, attended a meeting to discuss the attacks, flown an American flag outside their home, or given money to relief efforts. By September 19 – the first day for which a representative sample is available -- the mean participation rate in offline September 11-related activities had climbed to 1.36; by September 25, the mean had reached 1.99 activities<sup>7</sup> Among those respondents surveyed between September 12 and October 7, nearly 30 percent had participated in three or more activities, 56 percent in one or two activities, and 15 percent in no activities. In the discussion below, the online behaviors among respondents are contrasted with their level of participation in offline activities.

What were Internet users doing during these weeks? We analyzed the level of Web usage they reported, the types of sites Web users reported visiting, and the types of action in which Web users report engaging are discussed below

In the first weeks after the attack, overall use of the Internet declined. Compared to Internet use on an average day before September 11, the percentage of Americans using the Internet on a typical day declined by between 8% and 12% in the first days after the attacks. The number of Americans using the Internet on a typical day did not return to average levels until the beginning of October. This decline in overall usage was noted

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<sup>7</sup> With rolling cross-sectional data, a familiar method of analysis involves calculating a rolling mean across a given number of days. We report the means for a given among those responding to the survey on the presented date and the previous six days. In other words, a mean reported for September 18, 2001 reflects data gathered from respondents from September 12 thru September 18. In this case, as we measure the number of September 11-related offline activities, we would expect to see the mean climb rapidly as the examined behavior diffused across the population.

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among all types of Web users, including the most frequent and most experienced groups. However, while overall Internet usage declined, those reporting using the Web for news increased considerably, as the percentage of Internet users reporting getting news from the Web on a typical day rose to 25%-28% of Internet users after the attacks from 22% on any given day in the four weeks prior to the attacks.

Survey respondents were asked about their visits to eight different types of Web sites, corresponding to the producer types examined in the site analysis discussed earlier in this article. All but 11% of the respondents report visiting at least one of the eight types of Web sites prior to September 11, and 26% report visiting four or more of the site types. In the 6-week period following September 11, 46% of the respondents report visiting at least one of the types of sites. However, it is clear that most Web users focused their efforts on relatively few types of sites: fully one-third of those who visited any of the types examined reported visiting only one or two or three of them. At the same time, it is clear the more frequent users of the Internet visited a somewhat wider variety of sites as a result of September 11.

Many Web users visited press sites. Nearly one-quarter of all Internet users reported visiting a press site as a result of the September 11 events. None of the other types of sites were visited by more than ten percent of the Internet users as a result of the terrorist attacks. This suggests that although the Web enables virtually anyone to be an information provider, in times of crisis, press organizations still have unique importance to Internet users. More frequent Web users were more likely to visit every type of site than less frequent Web users. However, there was little relationship between participation in offline activities related to September 11 and visiting sites produced by most types of site producers.

What online actions were performed on these Web sites? Nearly half of all Internet users report using the Web to find news about the terrorist attacks. More than one-third of the Internet users report using the Web to find information about the reaction of the financial markets to the attacks. About a quarter of the Internet users sought out information about Osama bin Laden or Afghanistan. More than a quarter of Internet users used the Web to post or read the opinions of other individuals. About one-fifth of the Internet users downloaded a picture of the American flag, or sought information about victims or survivors. Not surprisingly, more frequent Internet users were more likely to engage in every single action examined than less frequent Internet users. However, engagement in offline activities related to September 11 was connected only to online actions associated with expression; online actions related to information, advocacy or assistance were not associated with offline activities.

The last set of analyses presented here assesses the extent to which Internet users found the Web helpful. Respondents were asked if they believed the Web helped them to “learn what was going on” or to “connect with people.” One fifth of all respondents said the Web helped them “a lot;” frequent users of the Web were more than three times as likely to say the Web helped them “a lot” than less frequent users of the Web. Similarly, about one-fifth of the respondents indicated that the Web played a major role in shaping their



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views. Finally, Internet users who used the Web for political advocacy were most likely to believe the Web helped a lot or played a major role in shaping their views.

### ***Implications***

Online actions are, in part, a function of online structures provided by producers. This analysis illustrates some of the synergies between these two types of data. While the data presented in this analysis do not account for the frequency with which users visited different kinds of sites offering different online structures – which would allow a full analysis of the relationship between online action and online structure – some preliminary estimates can be made. For example, the percent of Internet users who report getting information from the Web in the days and weeks following September 11 may have been a function of the number of sites that facilitated this action. Similarly, the relative paucity of sites facilitating advocacy or enabling the provision of information would have accurately predicted the relatively few users who reported engaging in this action. While the provision of structure does not guarantee action, it is clear that absent online structure, online action is not possible. Several implications can be drawn from these findings.

In addition, the findings illustrate the importance of the Web as a significant component of the public sphere, enabling coordination, information-sharing, assistance, expression and advocacy in a crisis situation. In addition, they demonstrate the value of Webmasters and other content producers as resources to be deployed in a time of crisis. Former Federal Communications Commissioner Reed Hundt has argued that one lesson to be drawn from the events of September 11 is that in order to maintain an effective communications system in the face of any calamity, the Internet should be protected and promoted as a primary network, encouraging the private sector and using the resources of the public sector to make it faster, more robust, ubiquitous, and better integrated with other media.

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## **Part 3**

# **The Rise of Do-it-yourself Journalism**

## **After September 11**

By Alex Halavais  
University at Buffalo, School of Informatics

A “Webscape” of examples for this section can be found at:  
<http://september11.archive.org/webscape/hal/>

### ***Key Findings***

The 9/11 attacks and their aftermath generated the most traffic to traditional news sites in the history of the Web. Equally as important was the fact that many non-news sites were turned into conduits for information, commentary, and action related to 9/11 events.

Do-it-yourself journalism has been a staple of Internet activity for years and the terrorist attacks gave new prominence to the phenomenon. In the days after the attacks, the Web provided a broad catalog of facts and fancy related to 9/11, ranging from eyewitness accounts from New York, Washington, and across the nation, to government reports, to analysis from experts and amateurs. With the eyes of the world focused on a small number of related events, many stepped into the role of amateur journalist, seeking out sources and sometimes assembling these ideas for others. Most striking, perhaps, were the wide number of accounts from those who had seen the World Trade Center collapse, or had in some way gained first-hand knowledge of surrounding events. Beyond that, many people posted their reactions to 9/11. At some sites these accounts, pictures and commentary were compiled and cataloged by Web producers outside the channels of traditional journalism.

### ***The Internet as an alternative news source***

The rapidity with which the Web has become a mass medium has left commentators and researchers on a constant lookout for “watershed moments”—those events which could credibly be considered defining moments of the new technology. Television was defined as a medium by a number of such events, including coverage of the 1948 conventions, the Nixon-Kennedy debate, and the Kennedy assassination and its aftermath. It may be that only hindsight will provide us with the perspective required to identify similar turning points for the Web, but that hasn’t stopped some from putting potential events in the running. The night of the 1996 election, the broadcast of the Mars Pathfinder mission, the breaking of the Lewinsky scandal and subsequent release of the voluminous Starr report—these and other events have each been singled out as *the* moment at which the Web came into its own.

In practice, there will probably be no single defining moment for Web, but these events all have elements in common. In each case, large numbers flocked to the new medium,

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and some were looking to fulfill a need that was not being met by the traditional news media.

There are many reasons Americans and those in the rest of the world turned to their computers after the events of September 11. For some, computer networks provided alternative interpersonal communication channels that allowed families and loved ones to stay in touch when the telephone and cellular networks were damaged or overloaded. Others used the Internet to collaboratively search for those lost in the confusion after the World Trade Center collapse. The vast majority of users, however, went to the Web in search of news.

### ***Tuning in***

For the average Web surfer, the news online in September probably looked very similar to the news off-line, since the largest names in news production off-line have created similarly popular Web sites. In the hours after the incidents, Web sites for CNN, the *New York Times*, and other traditional media outlets were shut down by traffic that was over a thousand times the norm. CNN alone received in excess of nine million requests for their main Web page every hour. This resulted in the servers for major news outlets shutting down, and (due to embattled domain name servers) much of the net slowing or becoming unreachable.

The largest news outlets responded quickly to the onslaught, reducing their main pages to plain text without any graphics in order to increase speed, in many cases eliminating all stories but those related to the attacks, and rapidly increasing server capacity. For example, see images of CNN.com from the morning of September 11:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011125160311/http://www.interactivepublishing.net/september/browse.php?co=CNN>. In addition, CNN began sending out hourly email updates to those who had earlier provided their address.

In the first hours after the attack, Google had a recommendation for Web surfers looking for news of the attacks, which its producers added to its normally sparse home page:

*If you are looking for news, you will find the most current information on TV or radio. Many online news services are not available because of extremely high demand. Below are links to news sites, including cached copies as they appeared earlier today.*

### ***Even non-news sites were compelled to orient towards 9/11 news***

The urgency of the news transformed many sites into news suppliers. Some of the larger participatory Web logs (“blogs”) are interesting examples of the way non-news sites were reoriented by “do it yourself” journalists during the crisis. The number of individual blogs has exploded in the last year, fueled at least in part by the incidents of September 11 and the various responses to those events. Some blogs attract a loyal following of participants who both contribute news items and discuss them. The prototypical example of such a blog, Slashdot.org, runs under the banner of “News for Nerds. Stuff that

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matters.” More than half a million users have registered for the site, and many more read it without commenting. Other popular participatory blogs include Plastic.com, Kuro5hin.org, and Fark.com.

Most of these blogs are not particularly interested in becoming “real” news sources (Fark’s motto: “It’s not news, it’s Fark.”), but they do provide a view of how many Web surfers seek and provide information online. Moreover, as is illustrated by the widely noted “Slashdot Effect,” these sites often connect large audiences to sites they would not ordinarily visit, resulting in “flash crowds” that focus attention on otherwise obscure Web sites.

During the days following September 11, all but a handful of the posted stories on Fark revolved around the events as they unfolded. In total, 157 posts related to the events appeared, from the link to a CNN article describing the airplanes’ crash into the towers on the 11<sup>th</sup> to a plea from the editor, Drew Curtis, late Saturday night that Sunday be reserved for unrelated news and entertainment. This rare note from the editor indicated that September 11 had forced Fark to change in unexpected ways:

*First off, a semi-apology. One thing we've had trouble with in the past few days is making a smooth transition from a comedy news site to a real news site. We really hadn't ever thought we would need to, and probably wouldn't have except for the fact that on 9/11 every major news site went down and someone had to pick up the slack. One of the hallmarks of Fark is that we occasionally post some occasionally extreme viewpoints, both liberal and conservative, as if they were bona fide fact. This is intentional (in case you haven't noticed or thought this was an accident). However, I let it continue in a couple cases after we converted to news format, and in hindsight I should have caught them before posting them. In particular, one article that fits the bill was the article posted on 9/13 claiming the CNN video of partying Palestinians was from 1991. I knew putting it up that it wasn't true. I received quite a bit of email criticizing the way that the headline was phrased as being misleading, which is true. However that was first time that I realized we'd passed from being a fun silly website to being a real source of news for people. This whole journalistic integrity thing really hadn't applied before.*

Slashdot carried a similar post from a normally silent Rob Malda, the originator of the site:

*The World Trade Towers in new york were crashed into by 2 planes, one on each tower, 18 minutes apart. Nobody really knows who did it, but the planes were big ones. Normally I wouldn't consider posting this on Slashdot, but I'm making an exception this time because I can't get news through any of the conventional websites, and I assume I'm not alone. **Update:** We're having server problems. Sorry. Updated info, both towers have collapsed, pentagon hit by 3rd plane. Part of it has collapsed.*

This change meant a new concentration on “legitimate” news sources for Fark, which tended to post only amusing or unusual news, and for Slashdot, which generally focuses only on technology issues.

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Of the topics appearing on Fark between September 11-15, 39% referred to articles from Web sites produced by traditional news organizations. Links to CNN were the most prominent among these, but the BBC, ABC, *Washington Post*, and several local newspaper sites also appeared. In addition, 19% of the links posted on Fark between September 11-15 led to Web-based news and information sites. Many of these, especially those posted soon after September 11, were similar to the traditional news sources, and many of these news sites, including Yahoo News and AZCentral, relied heavily on wire services like Reuters to provide information. Other sites broadened the perspective. For instance, there were links to sites like TomPaine.com, a widely read source of news and opinion with a liberal bent, and FreeRepublic.com, its conservative counterpart.

### ***Do-it-yourself journalism***

Those seeking news on the Web have unprecedented access to the basic evidence that makes up many news stories, and can become journalists themselves on narrow topics. Blogs may be the most prominent example of “do-it-yourself journalism,” but any Internet user can investigate the facts of a story without leaving the living room. The Web provided a broad catalog of facts and fancy related to September 11, ranging from eyewitness accounts from New York, Washington, and across the nation, to government reports, to analysis from experts and amateurs. With the eyes of the world focused on a narrow set of related events, many stepped into the role of amateur journalist, seeking out sources and sometimes assembling these ideas for others.

Most striking, perhaps, were the wide number of accounts from those who had seen the World Trade Center collapse, or had in some way gained first-hand knowledge of the surrounding events. Among these first-hand accounts were those from commentators who were accustomed to the media spotlight, but decided to put their first impressions on the Web. Michael Moore, for example, wrote of telephoning an office in the Towers, looking for a friend, and having the line go dead as the building collapsed (see [http://web.archive.org/web/20010917014244/www.michaelmoore.com/2001\\_0912.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20010917014244/www.michaelmoore.com/2001_0912.html)). Jon Katz, who wrote for many years for *Hotwired* on the effect the Web is having on the news, posted his experience of watching the Towers collapse on Slashdot (see <http://slashdot.org/articles/01/09/11/1842258.shtml>).

Some of these eyewitness narratives ran fairly long, while others consisted of little more than a single informational posting. Eyewitness accounts most frequently appeared on personal blogs, but they also appeared on Web sites that had very different purposes. On group blogs, first-person information was usually volunteered in very abbreviated form. For example, in the early discussion on Fark, someone identifying himself as an employee of Worldcom indicated that the World Trade Center housed one of the major switches for their telephone networks, and another noted that his friend, a volunteer firefighter in Pittsburgh, had been put on alert and advised that there was a hijacking before the plane crashed outside of Shanksville, Pennsylvania (see <http://forums.fark.com/cgi/fark/comments.pl?IDLink=45123>). Many of these accounts do not follow the canons in fact-checking, seeking out alternative or opposing views, or attempted impartiality. They are necessarily more socially constructed, and read more

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like rumors, with particular aspects of the story being embellished while others are left aside.

In some cases, these eyewitness reports were concentrated, compiled, or posted to larger audiences. Some individuals compiled commentary and eyewitness accounts over a period of time.<sup>8</sup> Others pooled what they saw as the most important information in an effort to record the event for the future. These included compilations of eyewitness accounts, photos and videos<sup>9</sup> (including space imaging<sup>10</sup>), infographics,<sup>11</sup> screenshots of news-related Web sites,<sup>12</sup> television reports,<sup>13</sup> and scans of front pages of local newspapers.<sup>14</sup> Of course, traditional media from around the world also compiled eyewitness accounts for their audiences, and BBC America noted receiving “thousands” of emails from eyewitnesses.<sup>15</sup>

The MediaMap site, and similar sites,<sup>16</sup> included links to official government information and experts’ views, telephone numbers for the involved airlines, and contacts for anecdotal and first-person accounts. On at least one site, the resources were presented as a “wikiwiki,” a feature that allowed visitors to easily append their own resources,<sup>17</sup> while another site provided answers to frequently asked research questions.<sup>18</sup> Those interested in primary sources could tap into press briefings posted on Web sites produced by Department of Defense,<sup>19</sup> the FBI,<sup>20</sup> the Red Cross,<sup>21</sup> the Vatican,<sup>22</sup> and dozens of other sources. Immediate analysis of the news media and advice to journalists was also available from sites like Newstrolls.com<sup>23</sup> and Poynter.org,<sup>24</sup> and Lexis-Nexis provided

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8 <http://web.archive.org/web/20011011020715/dereklink.com/WTC/wtc.htm>

9 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010917013306/http://kottke.org/index.html>,

<http://web.archive.org/web/20010917010820/www.worldnewyork.org/>,

<http://web.archive.org/web/20010917011105/www.mrbellersneighborhood.com/>

10 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010923185018/www.spaceimaging.com/level1/index32.htm>

11 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010917010826/www.nixlog.com/infographics/>

12 <http://web.archive.org/web/20011125160311/http://www.interactivepublishing.net/september/>

13 <http://tvnews3.televisionarchive.org/tvarchive/html/>, accessed 7 August 2002

14 <http://web.archive.org/web/20011107080651/http://www.poynter.org/Terrorism/gallery/extra1.htm>

15 <http://web.archive.org/web/20011128021100/http://www.rnw.nl/hotspots/html/eyewitness010914.html>,

[http://web.archive.org/web/20011003211012/http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in\\_depth/americas/2001/day\\_of\\_terror/eyewitness/9.stm](http://web.archive.org/web/20011003211012/http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/americas/2001/day_of_terror/eyewitness/9.stm)

16 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010915230802/http://www.mediamap.com/Sept11.asp>,

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011011083750/http://www.researchbuzz.com/911/metareference.html>

17 <http://web.archive.org/web/20011001193722/http://kgate.virtual.net/cgi-bin/wiki.cgi?action=Browse&id=SeptemberDisaster>

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<http://web.archive.org/web/20010915232332/http://www.ibiblio.org/journalism/NWSworldtradecenter.html>

19 [http://web.archive.org/web/20010913015622/www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2001/p09122001\\_p176-01.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20010913015622/www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2001/p09122001_p176-01.html)

20 e.g.,

<http://web.archive.org/web/20010916134341/http://www2.fbi.gov/pressrel/pressrel01/091401hj.htm>

21 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010918214448/http://www.redcross.org/press/disaster/>

22

[http://web.archive.org/web/20010917155616/http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_20010912\\_en.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20010917155616/http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010912_en.html)

23 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010916222515/http://www.newstrolls.com/>

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free access to archival materials related to the events.<sup>25</sup> This democratization of journalistic sources, while in no way rivaling the contacts of established journalists, provided new opportunities for individuals to explore the space of news and information more extensively. It also provided new sources of error, rumor, and propaganda.

### ***Nostradamus as news***

The Web was an incubator of rumor as well as an inoculator – knocking down rumors and other fanciful tales. Surprisingly, the keyword with greatest number of new searches on Google during the month of September was not “terrorism” or “WTC,” but “Nostradamus.”<sup>26</sup> As a result, the first site returned by Google—Nostradamus-repository.org<sup>27</sup>—saw a major spike in traffic, receiving over 1.2 million unique visitors according to Media Metrix.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, this site clearly refuted the idea that Nostradamus predicted the attacks on New York, yet the rumor persisted. Another site devoted to checking urban legends, Snopes, set up an entire section to deal exclusively with Web rumors surrounding September 11.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, Web sites could also help to give the rumors new life, by providing a fixed, seemingly authoritative reference. Indymedia, a group of sites dedicated to grass-roots, participatory reporting, was central to circulating a rumor that CNN had recycled archival films of Palestinians celebrating in the streets and rerun them as recent responses to the American disasters (see [http://web.archive.org/web/20010920004645/http://www.indymedia.org/front.php3?article\\_id=63288](http://web.archive.org/web/20010920004645/http://www.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=63288)). Likewise, the *Sun*, a British tabloid, printed a story of a firefighter “surfing” the rubble safely to the ground from the 83<sup>rd</sup> floor.

Several sites devoted attention to subjects they felt were “covered up” by the U.S. government. One popular conspiracy theory argued that there was strong evidence that the collapse of the Twin Towers was a result not of the collision and fire, but due to subsequent explosions designed to demolish the buildings (see <http://web.archive.org/web/20011216221742/http://www.rense.com/general17/eyewitnesreportspersist.htm>). Another theory had it that something was fishy with the damage to the Pentagon, and that it could not have been caused by an aircraft collision. This argument was made by a French author who presented it in Web form as a way of publicizing his book (see [http://www.asile.org/citoyens/numero13/pentagone/erreurs\\_en.htm](http://www.asile.org/citoyens/numero13/pentagone/erreurs_en.htm)). This theory was widely distributed *and* widely refuted.

### ***Implications: Beyond surveillance***

The Web provided new ways of getting at news and information; with a bit of skill those using the Web could locate a range of facts concerning the events of September 11 and

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24 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010925191736/63.208.24.134/Terrorism/index.htm>

25 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010915184229/www.lexisnexis.com/resources/>

26 <http://web.archive.org/web/20011125000040/http://www.google.com/press/zeitgeist/zeitgeist-sept.html>

27 <http://web.archive.org/web/20010920145851/www.nostradamus-repository.org/nycfaq.html>

28 [http://web.archive.org/web/20011027063737/http://jmm.com/xp/jmm/press/2001/pr\\_101501.xml](http://web.archive.org/web/20011027063737/http://jmm.com/xp/jmm/press/2001/pr_101501.xml)

29 <http://web.archive.org/web/20011126233107/http://www.snopes2.com/rumors/rumors.htm>

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what followed them. Five decades ago, media researcher Harold Lasswell identified several functions that the news media serve. Informing the audience about the environment around them—which Lasswell termed the “surveillance” function—was only one of the ways media served the public. Lasswell, and media scholars that have investigated journalism and communication since, have identified other important ways in which the news helps society function effectively. Journalists also must place current events in the context of recent history, indicate how the day’s news might illustrate the culture or ideals of a society, and help news consumers to plan a course of action. The Web fulfilled these functions in important ways post 9/11.

One legacy of 9/11 for online news is that growing numbers of Americans seem to want to supplement the material they get from traditional media via traditional mechanisms such as television, newspapers, and magazines. Some Internet users become journalists themselves, with no other outlet than the sites to which they post their material.

In the long run, the most significant effect of this do-it-yourself journalism might be its value to historians. They will be able to see all kinds of stories, detail, and data that might have been lost without a medium like the Internet on which to record it.



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## **Part 4**

### **Government Web Sites Respond to September 11**

**By Adrienne Massanari**  
**University of Washington, Department of Communication**

**A “Webscape” of examples for this section can be found at:**  
<http://september11.archive.org/webscape/mas/>

#### ***Key Findings***

Government Web sites are more important now to Internet users than they have ever been. The newest Pew Internet Project survey from June 26-July 26, 2002 shows that more than 70 million American adults have used government agency Web sites. That is an increase from the 60 million who had used government Web sites when the Project surveyed on the subject in the summer of 2001.

An analysis from the September 11 archive of public agency sites shows why they are significant sources of information to Internet users. Government sites provided a wealth of information and important services to Internet users in the days and weeks following September 11. The sites became clearinghouses of information for those directly or indirectly affected by the attacks, individuals interested in donating to the relief efforts, and the agencies’ own employees, who, in some cases, were victims of the attacks or the later anthrax scares. Some government sites highlighted the historical roots of terrorism and tried to place the attacks in some sort of political context. Few, however, entered into a dialogue with their visitors about the issues underlying the events of September 11, and fewer still encouraged individuals to offer their own opinions as to what response should be taken.

Types of actions enabled on government Web sites		
<i>The things that Internet users could do on government agency Web sites</i>	<i>Percentage of examined Web sites that enabled visitors to perform this action</i>	<i>Percentage of sites that enabled visitors to perform this action through a link to an external site</i>
Get information	76%	36%
Get assistance	28%	43%
Read others’ personal opinions and reactions	23%	21%
Express personal opinions or reactions	21%	25%
Provide assistance	19%	45%
Provide information	9%	32%
Advocate a particular policy response	0%	0%

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project analysis of 53 government agency Web sites in the September 11 Web Archive.*

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### ***Research sample***

Some 53 government sites from the September 11 Web Archive were examined for this sample. The overwhelming majority of these were U.S. federal government Web sites (41), a small minority were city or state sites (3), and a few were international government sites (9). The sample included the first impression available after September 11 that had content related to the attacks. The sample did not include sites that were unavailable in the public archive or those that were unavailable in English.

### ***Content related to September 11***

To assess the activities in which visitors could engage on government Web sites after September 11, sites were coded for seven different types of user actions. These included:

- Getting information about the agencies' activities or other important news relating to September 11
- Providing information about suspected terrorist activities
- Getting assistance (information or direct links to victims' benefits, financial assistance, or emotional support)
- Providing assistance through links and information about volunteering and donating blood, food, or clothing
- Expressing personal opinions or reactions to the events by signing condolence books or sending messages of support via email
- Accessing personal opinions or reactions to the events by reading statements from public officials or condolence books
- Advocating for a particular policy response to the attacks

Each government Web site was reviewed to determine the types of user actions it enabled directly and any special features about the action were noted. Sites were also examined for links to external sites that allowed visitors to engage in one or more of these actions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, providing access to information about the attacks was the role most frequently performed by Web sites of government entities (76% of sites enabled this action). Sites also allowed individuals to get assistance (28%), access opinion or reactions to the events (23%), express their own opinions and reactions (21%), and provide assistance to the victims (19%). Very few sites allowed Internet users to provide their own information related to the attacks (9%) and none of the examined Web sites allowed individuals to advocate for a particular policy response to the events. Perhaps surprisingly, fewer than half of the government sites linked to other Web resources where visitors could provide assistance (45%) or get assistance (43%). No government Web sites linked to external sites where individuals could advocate a particular response to the attacks.

### ***Informing the public***

Many of the government sites pointed to the FirstGov portal, subtitled "Your first click to the U.S. government." This site compiled a comprehensive list of links and information relating to the tragedy. These included a list of sites that accepted tips and information

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about the attacks, organizations accepting financial and blood donations and those providing victims' benefits, and information about September 11-related scams and frauds. The site's October 15, 2001 impression also listed other ways in which individuals could show their support of the country, through flying the American flag, sending letters and cards to US troops, and volunteering.<sup>30</sup>

Besides linking to FirstGov, individual agencies also provided information on their own sites about the attacks. Some provided special sections about terrorist activities and/or tried to place September 11 into some sort of historical context. The CIA added a special part called "The War on Terrorism" that provided information about Osama Bin Ladin and his previous terrorist activities. On October 5, 2001 the CIA site contained statements about the potential terrorist use of biological and chemical agents, statements from the CIA director, George J. Tenet, to his employees and the American public, and links to other agencies involved in counter-terrorism activities.<sup>31</sup>

Many sites were updated quickly in the days following the attacks. Since so much new information was available on a daily (and sometimes hourly) basis, some agencies chose to insert an interstitial page with the most up-to-date information about their response to the attacks in front of their usual home page. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was one such site.<sup>32</sup> The page notified the public that the Reagan National Airport was still closed, provided a list of frequently asked questions regarding air travel, and included links to statements made by the Secretary of Transportation. While this page had a stripped-down look unlike the rest of the FAA site, it provided critical information about the status of the nation's air travel for domestic and international travelers. The page also included a time stamp in the top left corner, since it was updated several times each day during the weeks after September 11.

Government agencies' Web sites also played a significant role in providing information to their employees, many of whom were detached to crisis-related duties, displaced from their normal chores, or otherwise affected by the attacks. One such organization was the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which had offices in the 7 World Trade Center building. From a small link on the home page that read, "Information for SEC NERO staff," employees who worked for the SEC's Northeast Regional Office were taken to a Web page that asked them to call a toll free number to check in, provided information on counseling services available to employees and their families, and encouraged to communicate with one another about the tragedy.<sup>33</sup>

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) site also played a key role in informing government employees and managers about emergency procedures, coping with the tragedies, and how they could help with the relief efforts.<sup>34</sup> This site also listed a contact

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<sup>30</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011015132546/firstgov.gov/featured/usgresponse.html>

<sup>31</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011005212406/http://www.cia.gov/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010914220536/http://www.faa.gov/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010920170854/http://www.sec.gov/secnero.htm>

<sup>34</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010923215534/www.opm.gov/guidance/index.htm>

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phone number and email address for former federal employees who desired to return to government service because of the attacks.

*Involving the public in the investigations*

Many government sites not only provided information about their agencies' involvement with the rescue and recovery operations, but also elicited information from their visitors about the attacks. Numerous sites linked to the Internet Fraud Complaint Center (IFCC), a site that usually encourages visitors to report incidents of Internet fraud, but was restructured in the days following the attacks to allow individuals to report suspected terrorist activity. The impression from September 14, 2001 included information about the IFCC and its mission, as well as a prominent link that read, "Report Terrorist Activity" which sent visitors to an online form.<sup>35</sup>

*Offering assistance to the victims and others touched by the tragedy*

Assisting victims of September 11 became a critical role that government agencies filled in the weeks following the attacks. Impressions of their Web sites from the weeks after the attacks reflect this mission.

For individuals residing near Ground Zero, perhaps the most useful site was the New York City Web site.<sup>36</sup> Within days of the attacks it provided links to information about how families could help identify victims by providing DNA samples, contact information for missing persons hotlines, and phone numbers and addresses for shelters throughout the Manhattan area. The site also provided extensive assistance to affected business owners, including information on building access, power, utilities, and postal service outages, and financial and tax help.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) also provided an extensive list of assistance organizations. Their list from September 25, 2001 contained contact information for 28 different agencies providing services such as legal representation, financial assistance, counseling, temporary housing, and medical treatment.<sup>37</sup> The list also linked to these organizations' Web sites, where appropriate.

*Providing suggestions for direct action*

A large number of government sites provided lists of resources for those looking to support the relief efforts, either financially, or through donations of food, clothing, or blood. Many of the government agencies linked to the American Liberty Partnership, a Web site that collected donations for a variety of organizations, including the September 11<sup>th</sup> Fund, the American Red Cross, and the Salvation Army. The impression from September 20, 2001 provided visitors with information about the ways in which charities

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<sup>35</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010914220535/www1.ifccfbi.gov/index.asp>

<sup>36</sup> [http://web.archive.org/web/20010919065821/http://home.nyc.gov/portal/index.jsp?pageID=nyc\\_home](http://web.archive.org/web/20010919065821/http://home.nyc.gov/portal/index.jsp?pageID=nyc_home)

<sup>37</sup> [http://web.archive.org/web/20010925222740/www.fema.gov/nwz01/nwz01\\_117a.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20010925222740/www.fema.gov/nwz01/nwz01_117a.htm)

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were helping the recovery efforts and connected them to an online form where they could financially contribute to these organizations.<sup>38</sup>

While many sites encouraged their adult visitors to donate to organizations after September 11, the White House made a direct appeal to children. In October 2001, the President created “America’s Fund for Afghan Children” and asked American children to send in \$1 each to help feed and clothe the children of Afghanistan. This call-to-action was echoed on the White House’s Web site. On October 31, 2001, the site included a short fact sheet about the rampant starvation and poverty in Afghanistan and linked to audio and video versions of the President’s statements regarding the program.<sup>39</sup>

Although other government Web sites provided information to adults about supporting the emotional needs of children following September 11 (such as the Department of Education’s Web site on November 10, 2001), the White House site was one of the few that directly addressed children or the role that they could play following the attacks.<sup>40</sup>

### ***International responses of condolence***

Only a few international governmental Web sites were included in this study, primarily because English versions were either unavailable or not identified for inclusion in the archive. However, the international sites analyzed focused overwhelmingly on providing messages of support and condolence to Americans. The Canadian government’s Web site encouraged Canadians to write messages of condolence, which were then posted to the site for a short time. On September 25, 2001, the Web site also included a message from the Canadian Prime Minister, encouraging solidarity and tolerance in the face of the attacks.<sup>41</sup> The North American Treaty Organization (NATO) Web site posted a special section about the attacks that included press releases and statements from members, photographs of the NATO flags at half-mast, and condemnation of the September 11 attacks.<sup>42</sup> NATO’s home page on September 14, 2001 also contained information about international meetings resulting from the events.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, site visitors could access articles and other resources about the organization’s structure and member countries.

Responses from other countries’ Web sites focused more on the political issues resulting from the attacks. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan’s site contained many statements from President Pervez Musharraf condemning the attacks and offered condolences to the American public.<sup>44</sup> British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Web site provided a statement regarding the terrorist attacks which visitors could download in a number of languages.<sup>45</sup> The statement offered condolences to the U.S. and British victims and outlined his views on what the international community should do to respond to the terrorist attacks.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010920004933/http://www.libertyunites.org/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011031115834/www.whitehouse.gov/afac/>

<sup>40</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011110122935/ed.gov/inits/september11/index.html>

<sup>41</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010925192252/commemoration.gc.ca/11sept2001/bio.cfm?lang=EN>

<sup>42</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010914220616/www.nato.int/terrorism/index.htm>

<sup>43</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010914220537/http://www.nato.int/>

<sup>44</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010917011027/http://www.pak.gov.pk/>

<sup>45</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011011223139/http://www.number-10.gov.uk/default.asp?PageID=4858>

<sup>46</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011109174530/www.number-10.gov.uk/default.asp?pageid=4883>

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Additionally, other areas of the site provided information about Blair's domestic and international agenda in light of the September 11 events.

***“Where do we go from here?”***

The Peace Corps' Web site encouraged individuals to participate in their programs after September 11, calling on them to “continue our work.” Messages of support from colleagues in host countries were posted, and Peace Corps volunteers serving during the attacks responded that they felt supported and comforted by host villages. One individual serving in Bulgaria wrote the following:

*I am not in America to see and experience what Americans are truly facing, but as an American serving abroad, I see and feel the support of the world, who is standing beside us with amazing vigor. America shall overcome this, one step at a time. And, as America rises to victory, hundreds of Peace Corps volunteers are scattered in nations throughout the world, serving and forming relationships and bonds with millions of people, who are all standing behind a much-admired country of freedom, opportunity, and security 100%. Both mine and Bulgaria's thoughts and prayers are with you all.<sup>47</sup>*

The site encouraged its visitors to get involved – especially returned volunteers who had first-hand experience with learning about and living in another culture. Additionally, the site provided links to the FirstGov and American Liberty Partnership sites for more information about how individuals could help.

***What's missing?***

Some government Web sites, like those for the Senate and the House of Representatives, provided minimal information about the attacks outside of their press release section. During the anthrax attacks, the House of Representatives' site had a small notice containing information about the building's safety and provided links to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Postal Service, but this was the only indication that the site's producers had updated it since September 11.<sup>48</sup>

The Web sites of two committees heavily involved in the aftermath of September 11, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Intelligence Committee had little or no content about the attacks.<sup>49</sup> These omissions are surprising in light of these organizations' high visibility in the public sphere. However, individual members of U.S. legislative bodies, like Senator Hillary Clinton from New York, were quick to respond to the attacks, providing a plethora of information on their sites for victims and for those interested in donating to the relief efforts.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Quote from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011110024342/www.peacecorps.gov/news/breakingnews/support.cfm>

<sup>48</sup>

[http://web.archive.org/web/20011025040556/www.house.gov/house\\_advisory\\_information\\_page\\_011024.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20011025040556/www.house.gov/house_advisory_information_page_011024.html)

<sup>49</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010913004556/foreign.senate.gov/menu.html> and

<http://web1.archive.org/web/20010913002703/intelligence.senate.gov/>

<sup>50</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20010913000503/http://clinton.senate.gov/>

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Interestingly, none of the government sites that reviewed for this study allowed visitors to advocate for a particular political response to the attacks. While some sites did provide email addresses for government officials, no government-produced site encouraged individuals to contact their representatives and express their opinions or policy preferences in the aftermath of the attacks.

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## **Part 5**

### **Keeping the Faith Online After September 11**

**By Elena Larsen**  
**Research fellow, Pew Internet & American Life Project**

**A “Webscape” of examples for this section can be found at:**  
<http://september11.archive.org/webscape/lar/>

#### ***Key Findings***

This paper examines the many ways religious groups addressed the crisis of September 11 on their Web sites. Denominational sites were chosen to represent religious sites since they provide resources to clergy and congregant alike. In all, the faiths of over 100 million Americans are represented in the sites included in this study.

- The most common needs addressed on the 22 denominational sites reviewed were the physical and financial needs of the immediate victims of the attacks and their families. Notably, the denominations already had their own standing relief mechanisms in place, so were able to organize their own relief efforts. Thus, none linked potential contributors to the Red Cross.
- Denominations used their Web sites to respond to the needs of members themselves. The most extensive collections of links available on the denominational sites sought to provide spiritual and emotional assistance to members dealing with the aftermath of the attacks.
- Some sites provided linked sections where visitors could get a brief introduction to Islam.
- Questions that, for many, had been mere theological discussions, such as why does God permit evil, became pained cries. Such questions were not addressed substantively by the denominations on their Web sites.

#### ***Background***

Religious organizations touch the lives of nearly nine of every ten Americans.<sup>51</sup> In the wake of the September 11 attacks, as people clung to their sets awaiting precious drops of information, religious offices and clergy stepped up into their own roles. They had to provide the strength to help people withstand the shock and horror of what had happened. They had to support victims, members, and community leadership. They sought to direct anger and fear away from thought of indiscriminate revenge and toward rebuilding the lives that had been shattered. They were faced with the hardest questions, ones not pressed upon the government or the press. Where was God? How could such evil be allowed? Why NOT seek the harshest vengeance?

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<sup>51</sup> [http://www.adherents.com/rel\\_USA.html](http://www.adherents.com/rel_USA.html) - religions



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To meet these needs, churches and temples opened their doors to offer water and phones to people fleeing Ground Zero. Around the country, they kept their doors open for all-night vigils. They checked on members. Many denominations used their web sites to address these urgent needs and questions. This paper examines the many ways religious groups addressed the crisis on their Web sites.

Note: This paper does not attempt to evaluate the response of various denominations to September 11 according to their Internet actions. Some denominations rely far more on the Internet than do others, and incorporate more features into their Web sites. The fact that one denomination may have addressed more needs online than another does NOT mean that it was more responsive to the needs of its members. Different denominations have different organizational structures for their own governance, and their own ways of handling crises within their communities. The Internet is just one of many tools they use.

### ***Research sample***

For this study, sites were that reflected communal, rather than individual, responses. Thus, religiously-oriented Web sites created by individuals are not included. Nor are Web sites created by individual churches. The Pew Internet & American Life Project, in its study of congregational Web sites (“Wired Churches, Wired Temples” (<http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=28>) found that congregations overwhelmingly rely on volunteers to maintain their sites, and have difficulty keeping them up to date. In view of those findings, it seemed unlikely that individual congregations would employ their Web sites in their response to the September 11 events.

Denominational offices, however, provide resources to clergy and congregant alike. They have their own organizations for relief efforts, and connections with international organizations that often provide information to their own press services. The best organized can provide an alternative voice to government and commercial media, and deliver resources available quickly from no other source. Therefore, denominational sites were chosen.<sup>52</sup>

There are literally scores, perhaps hundreds, of Christian denominations in the United States. By no means do all of them have denominational Web sites. The sites here are those of denominations with membership of over 500,000, as identified by the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey ([http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/aris\\_index.htm](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/aris_index.htm)). In addition, the sample included sites that represented Judaism, Islam, Unitarian Universalism, and earth-centered religions in the United States.

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<sup>52</sup> Note: I use the word “denomination” in a sense broader than its application to Christian groups. Rather, I use it in terms of an organization to which communities of worshipers, or congregations, see as a parent organization. Thus, the Nation of Islam web site is classed as a denominational site because it represents Nation of Islam communities across the country.

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The impressions of the chosen sites appeared in the weeks and months after September 11, 2001. The archive did not have readable impressions available for all denominations. In all, the faiths of over 100 million Americans are represented in the sites included in this study.<sup>53</sup> The denominations include: Roman Catholic, United Methodist, Lutheran (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Lutheran Church Missouri Synod), Pentecostal, Episcopal, Judaism, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, United Church of Christ, Islam (including Nation of Islam), Seventh-Day Adventist, Eastern Orthodox, Assemblies of God, Unitarian Universalist, Church of the Nazarene, and Wiccan/Pagan/Druid.

### ***Including September 11 content***

Of the 22 Web sites reviewed, all had some degree of content reflecting the attacks in the weeks following September 11. On some sites, references to the attacks were minimal. The Web site for the Church of Latter Day Saints, for instance, primarily referenced the national memorial service it held on September 14, 2001. The producers of other denominational sites created entire sections devoted to September 11 and maintained relevant resource links for months, often using striking graphics to keep links to those sections visible. Just one example can be seen at archived sites of the Episcopal Church in the USA, at <http://web.archive.org/web/20010923004842/http://ecusa.anglican.org>.

These dedicated sections addressed a variety of purposes, from meeting the material needs of victims and families to the psychological needs of members throughout the country. The following sections describe how denominations used their sites to respond to these needs.

### ***Helping the people of New York and Washington***

The most common needs addressed on the 22 denominational sites reviewed were the physical and financial needs of the immediate victims of the attacks and their families. Fourteen sites told viewers where they could send money to help with relief efforts. In addition, the United Methodist Church announced on its site a separate scholarship fund started for dependents of victims (<http://web.archive.org/web/20011009030543/umc.org/usattack/>). The sites of the United Church of Christ and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had the capacity to accept electronic donations, a feature generally absent from most denominational sites.

Notably, all the relief funds were denominationally operated; none, for example, linked potential contributors to the Red Cross. The denominations already had in place the structure to collect and administer relief funds, so they could quickly respond to the financial needs engendered by the attacks.

Perhaps the most sophisticated Internet-enabled relief strategy was that shown on the Assemblies of God Web site. It allowed visitors to register on an inter-denominational

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<sup>53</sup> Even so, there are several religious groups that are significant in number but not represented. At least 2.5 million Americans are non-denominational Christians, who do not have a single “denominational” site to attend their needs as a group. Also, this sample does not account for religious fringe groups with hate agendas.

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database for volunteers willing to provide long-term relief. “The immediate outpouring of support since Tuesday, September 11, 2001, has produced more short-term volunteers than the relief efforts can handle. Our goal is to establish a long-term strategy, support network and recovery program in the months, even years to come.”

([http://web.archive.org/web/20011012112248/www.ag.org/top/operation\\_hope/volunteer\\_db\\_instructions.cfm](http://web.archive.org/web/20011012112248/www.ag.org/top/operation_hope/volunteer_db_instructions.cfm)) The volunteer form allowed individuals to offer their professional skills as clergy, construction workers, medical workers, counselors and social workers, computer programmers or Web designers, lawyers or accountants. Those without a profession could offer prayer support, foster care, office assistance, or other services. Volunteers could also note how much notice they needed before they could appear to serve, and the time period in which they could serve.

### *Coping after the crisis*

*Never in our worst nightmares did we imagine that we would be witnessing such a horrendous event and human tragedy inflicted on our American friends. We care for every life and we pray for all those who are mourning the loss of loved ones taken away by this indiscriminate act of organized terror. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all.*

*Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb  
Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem  
Palestine*

*We forcefully denounce this inhuman and unjustified action, and we join our sufferings with the American people. On behalf of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, ordained and lay, we assure the President, the government and the people of the United States of our ceaseless prayers, calling upon Almighty God to comfort the hearts of the bereaved for the loss of their dear ones, and beseeching Him to heal all the injured in body, mind or-spirit.*

*RT. Rev. Riah Aby El-Asel  
Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem*

After providing an outlet for members to help others, denominations used their Web sites to respond to the needs of members themselves. Pastoral letters of concern, comfort, and hope appeared on almost all of the major denominational Web sites. Traditionally, such letters are often read in the congregational setting, and many probably were. But denominational leaders used their sites not only to send their own letters directly to their members, but to pass on messages from clergy and churches around the world. The two letters shown above, selected especially for coming from the Middle East, are just a few of many that were linked to the American Baptist Web site

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20011009232933/http://www.abc-usa.org/>).

And help went beyond words of condolence. The most extensive collections of links available on the denominational sites sought to provide spiritual and emotional assistance to members dealing with the aftermath of the attacks. Many of these resources were religious in nature. Prayers, hymns, and liturgies were provided to help shaken

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communities come together to pray and seek comfort and guidance. Links to scriptural texts were made to help people understand and reassure themselves about the promises of God.

In addition, the denominational sites provided copious resources from psychologists, educators, and government agencies to help people cope with fear and stress, and to provide practical advice on emergency preparedness. In particular, they provided material to help parents talk to and comfort their children. Denominational sites also provided resources to clergy who might be facing unprecedented demands from their congregations. The United Church of Christ was unique in providing material to help people care for families coping with financial crises that may have arisen after the attacks (<http://web.archive.org/web/20011117004534/www.ucc.org/911/mailling10.pdf>). Some denominational sites addressed the mixed set of needs experienced by members, providing counseling resources while encouraging individuals to remain active in and draw spiritual strength from their own congregations.

### ***Understanding Islam***

The attacks underscored Americans' general ignorance about Islam, and reinforced the worst stereotypes held by many. The Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist, Greek Orthodox, and United Church of Christ Web sites all provided linked sections where visitors could get a brief introduction to Islam. Generally, the content on these sections emphasized that Islam is a religion of peace and submission to Allah. They also pointed out that it venerates Jesus among its prophets. A few had a special section on the meaning of jihad, all of which rejected its interpretation as a call to armed warfare.

Islam.org also provided visitors with an introduction to the tenets of its faith. Its front page, on September 16, included a section on building better relations between Christians and Muslims. "With over 1 billion followers each, Islam and Christianity are major religions that influence the thinking and values of over 40% of the World population. There is sufficient common ground for Muslims and Christians to understand each other and move together in the Path of Truth, Peace and Justice." (<http://web.archive.org/web/20010916222047/http://islam.org/>)

These same organizations, along with some others, used their sites to encourage members to support Muslims in their own communities. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations expressed outrage at attacks on Arab and Muslim Americans on their site (<http://web.archive.org/web/20011031214334/uahc.org/pr/2001/010913.html>). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provided on their Web site a help sheet for discussing Islam with youth (<http://web.archive.org/web/20011114132958/www.elca.org/dcm/youth/resource/helpsheets/muslim.html>) and a sample letter of solidarity that congregations could send to local mosques (<http://web.archive.org/web/20011120111503/www.elca.org/dcs/disaster/solidarity.pdf>). The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) urged support also for Sikhs, who were likely to be targeted by angry Americans simply because they wear headaddresses. Their site

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(<http://web.archive.org/web/20010919215905/www.uua.org/uuawo/alerts/reachingout.html>) included a section entitled “Four Ways to Support Muslims and Arab Americans” – one of those ways being to be a voice of reason in Internet chat rooms where other participants were calling for violent response.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,<sup>54</sup> United Methodist Church,<sup>55</sup> Islam.org,<sup>56</sup> United Church of Christ<sup>57</sup>, and American Baptist Churches<sup>58</sup> all promoted funds to help Afghan citizens affected by years of hardship and the American-led war.

### *Understanding and response*

Leaders of religious groups faced some of the thorniest questions in the aftermath of September 11 – arguably tougher even than those addressed to the U.S. government. Questions that, for many, had been mere theological discussions, such as why does God permit evil, became pained cries. Furthermore, though religious frameworks were often used to call for “justice” and not “vengeance,” many could not see what “justice” for such horrific acts would be. What “just” response could atone for the brutal murder of thousands of innocents? Where was God when this was happening, and would He passively sit by and let this happen again?

Such questions were not addressed substantively by the denominations on their Web sites.

Within days of the attacks, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson aroused fury across the nation by blaming gays, lesbians, pagans, feminists, abortionists, the ACLU, and the federal courts (among others) for removing God’s protection from the country, and allowing the attacks to occur. The backlash was immediate from both President Bush and the press. Only one of the denominational sites reviewed, the Seventh Day Adventists’, posted a direct rebuttal asserting that the attacks were not God’s punishment (<http://web.archive.org/web/20011017101555/www.adventist.org/news/data/2001/08/1000824576/index.html.en>).

This statement was the closest any of the 22 denominational sites came to providing a direct explanation for the attacks. They were more likely to address the question of evil generally, and to accept its existence as an unavoidable component of a free-will world. But they also see the opportunity for people to use their free will to let God’s will rise even in horrendous tragedy. The firemen, policeman, and volunteers who arrived from all over the country to help their fellow citizens were shown as the face of God in the crisis.

Without a solid framework explaining evil, the sites were generally also vague about the proper U.S. policy response. While individuals were offered the opportunity to help

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<sup>54</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011120103803/www.elca.org/dgm/disaster/afghan2.html>

<sup>55</sup> <http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor/loveupdate/afghan.stm>

<sup>56</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011013210840/www.islamicity.com/contribute/afghanistan/>

<sup>57</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20011117014827/www.ucc.org/disaster/d110201b.htm>

<sup>58</sup> [http://web.archive.org/web/20011020052442/www.abc-oghs.org/world\\_relief\\_news.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20011020052442/www.abc-oghs.org/world_relief_news.htm)

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those who had been hurt, there was little offered to guide them in their contemplations of the proper response to the attackers.

The United Church of Christ site linked to an article “Is there a theological response to terrorism?”

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20011117011125/www.ucc.org/911/092101a.htm>) that discussed religious thought on dealing with violent aggressors. It outlined Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theologies of war. The minister Louis Farrakhan, in his address posted on the Nation of Islam home page, noted that both Christianity and Islam have rules on “just war,” that lay out permissible causes of and conduct for warfare. A few of the denominational sites essentially appealed to the just war tradition when they reluctantly agreed that military action would be needed against in order to save innocent lives from further terrorist attacks. They generally appealed to the President to limit military attacks and minimize casualties among innocent civilians.

A more common theme among the sites was a call for justice rather than war. But few of the sites elucidated that theme to help an angry populace understand what it would mean. Many people wondered if the hijackers were already dead, what justice could be afforded?

The United Methodist Web site provided uniquely well-organized assistance in this regard. Its page on official denominational statements, linked to its September 11 pages, provides a long list of principles including those on war, terrorism, and justice (<http://web.archive.org/web/20010926212323/infoserv.umc.org/faq/nationaltragedypage2.htm>). An essay on Restorative Justice, for example, promotes of vision of justice that focuses on healing communities rather than merely punishing wrongdoers. While the essay was written well before the events of September 11, it provides the groundwork for seeking a justice other than war. One of its mandates is that the nation examine itself critically to understand what actions it had taken to ground violent emotion against it. However, the principles are worded in general terms, and do not actively call people together for reflection and action.

The United Church of Christ’s invitation to members, “Blessed are the peacemakers: What does in mean to be a Just-Peace church in times like these?” reflects the way one denomination invited its members to grapple with the issue (<http://www.ucc.org/jwm/911b.htm>). Those who clicked through the section were invited to share their thoughts on applying principles of just peace to addressing the attacks. There were no answers provided, just an opportunity to seek them.

### ***Conclusions***

Religious denominations of the United States strove to meet the needs of both victims and their own members in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. They used their Web sites to help meet physical and financial, spiritual and emotional needs. Their Web sites were employed in attempts to keep people together, to grieve with them, to encourage them to rebuild their lives and the lives of their neighbors. But the sites did not provide pat answers to the hard questions raised. Denominational sites carried little

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content in the first few weeks after the attacks to help their members address or even ask questions of what response was appropriate, how peace could be built, and how the United States had brought such wrath on itself. The adage “think globally, act locally” was manifested on those sites that sought to help their members better understand Islam, and to encourage them to reach out in friendship to their Muslim neighbors. But there was little help for those who wanted to act globally, or at least influence policy decisions. Those denominational sites that called for justice often lacked the resources to help members understand, envision and work towards it.



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## **Part 6**

### **Personal Expression on the Post-September 11 Web**

**By Erica Siegl**  
**University of Washington, Department of Communication**

**A “Webscape” of examples for this section can be found at:**  
<http://september11.archive.org/webscape/sie/>

#### ***Key Findings***

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the Internet provided a virtual public space where grief, fear, anger, patriotism and even hatred could be shared. While the expression posted to the Web in response to the attacks spanned the range of human emotion, this study suggests that foremost among them were expressions of grief and condolence, followed by religious or spiritual expression. And despite the fact that Internet users from many different countries created the expression analyzed in this study, expression of American patriotism still appeared on close to half of the Web sites analyzed. It is clear that for many the Internet afforded an opportunity to users to respond to the crisis personally. For those whose only contact with the attacks came through a television set, the Internet provided a way to connect emotionally with a “virtual community” whose ties were not geographic, but bounded by common experience. Today, this expression serves as a reminder of how a nation in mourning could share the burden of grief and feel the support of Internet users from across the country and around the world.

The tenor of online postings	
	<i>Percentage of examined Web sites on which this category of expression was present</i>
Sadness, grief, condolences	75%
Religious/ spiritual expression	61%
Anger, fear, hate	52%
Shock and disbelief	48%
Patriotic expression	46%
Critical analysis of why attacks happened or who was responsible for them	37%
Advocating nonviolent response	36%
Advocating military response	25%
Expressions unrelated to the purpose of the site	8%

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project analysis of 84 Web sites allowing people to post and read comments about 9/11 events and their aftermath from the period Sept. 11-Oct. 2, 2001.*



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### ***Background***

In the 48 hours after the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, Americans turned to the television as their primary source of news and information, according to analysis at the time by the Pew Internet & American Life Project. However, generalized and broad television coverage could not often help individuals with specific questions about missing people. The loss of phone service around Ground Zero and the Pentagon compounded the anxiety of those seeking information about loved ones, pushing them to seek alternatives modes of communication such as email, instant messaging, and later, online registries. In fact, nearly one-third of Internet users reported in the first weeks after the attacks that the Internet “helped them connect with people they needed to reach,” the Pew Internet Project found.

At the same time, the Internet served a different communication need by providing a place for people to express themselves. Internet users in America and abroad turned in record numbers to chat rooms, email listservs and message boards to both post comments and read those posted by others. Engaging in these online meetings and chats allowed for the creation of online communities where Americans could “sort out their feelings and hash out their views,” a Pew Internet Project report argued at the time. Today, the collection of expression included in the September 11 Web Archive serves as a public record of the how Internet users around the world responded online to the events of September 11, 2001.

### ***Research goals and criteria***

The primary goal of this report is to describe the variety of expression found in online postings in the first three weeks after the attacks. For the purposes of this study, analysis was limited to textual expression posted publicly to a variety of listservs, blogs, chat rooms, guest books and memorial sites for the three-week period beginning September 11 and ending October 2, 2001. To obtain a sample for this study, 84 Web sites were selected from a larger sample of English-language sites drawn from the September 11<sup>th</sup> Web Archive. A site was included in the sample for this study if it had the capacity for visitors to post their own expression and/or access the expression of others’ on the Web site. The sites selected represent a broad cross section of the categories of Web sites that supported the ability of visitors to express themselves online, including those produced by individuals, charity or civic organizations, businesses, and governments, as well as those Web sites created for the sole purpose of memorializing the attacks.

Based on preliminary analysis, a typology of expression was developed. For the purpose of this study, expression is categorized into nine different content categories. These different types of expression include:

1) shock and disbelief; 2) sadness, grief and condolences; 3) religious or spiritual; 4) anger, fear, and hate; 5) patriotic; 6) critical or rational expression, attempting to answer questions such as “why did this happen?” and “who is responsible?”; 7) misuse or abuse of a Web site; 8) advocating a military response or 9) advocating a nonviolent response to the attacks.

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Each of these categories of expression is described in the following paragraphs and illustrated with examples from the collection of Web sites analyzed. Because multiple impressions of each Web site were analyzed, (one from each of the three weeks as available), it was possible to examine how expression changed over time. This allowed for the observation of how each of the categories of expression appeared with either greater or less frequency in each of the subsequent weeks. Each posting was “counted” in each relevant category. For example, “God bless America,” was counted as an instance of both patriotic and religious/spiritual expression. Due to the limited sample size for certain weeks, data should be interpreted as suggestive of a trend towards either increasing or decreasing frequency of expression, but not definitive. Because this study relies upon sites included in the September 11 Web Archive during the first three weeks after the attacks, it is entirely possible that the forms of expression observed on these archived sites were either much more or less common on live Web sites at the time of the attacks

### ***Analysis and result***

Expressions of sadness, grief and condolences were the most common on these Web sites. Fully 75% had such comments, followed by spiritual/religious statements, then expressions of shock and disbelief and patriotism. Unlike the other categories of expression, statements about the poster’s grief appeared consistently throughout the time period of this study. Religious or spiritual expression, the second most common subcategory, appeared on over 60% of the Web sites with declining frequency over the three weeks. Included in this category are references to prayer, quotations taken from Biblical texts, and phrases like “God bless you.” While patriotic testimonials and statements about a poster’s initial shock to the attacks appeared on 46% and 48% of Web sites surveyed respectively, patriotic expression is found consistently throughout the three weeks while expressions about the initial shock of the attacks is found increasingly over the period of this study. Analysis of the data also reveals an increasing trend for negative and critical analysis, while advocating a negative response declined over time. Despite appearing on less than 10% of the Web sites in this study, there was consistent evidence of the misuse or abuse of Web sites throughout the time frame. The sections below provide examples of each of these nine forms of expression.

#### *Expression of initial shock*

Present in nearly 50% of the Web sites analyzed, expressions of initial shock included discussion of the poster’s shock, horror, numbness and incredulity at the attacks. These emotions were expressed not only by Internet users physically close to World Trade Center towers, Pentagon or Pennsylvania sites, but also by Internet users around the world. In the links below are three different examples of initial expression.

In this example of an online chat taking place simultaneously with the attacks, the dialogue for the first few minutes is nearly devoid of emotion. (All the quotations use the grammar, spelling, and punctuation of the postings as they appeared.)

*Plane crashes in to the word trade center. Apologies for not linking to anything besides the main CNN page but there are no full stories on this yet. The plane crashed into the building about six minutes ago, from what the TV is saying. We*

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*are about sixty blocks north and we can see the smoke over the skyline.*  
posted by [karen](#) at 5:58 AM PST (491 comments total)

*oops looks like i missed it by a minute.*  
posted by [karen](#) at 6:00 AM PST on September 11

*I missed it by two. That doesn't look good.*  
posted by [rcade](#) at 6:01 AM PST on September 11

*Just as an FYI, it's New York City, not Chicago.*  
posted by [karen](#) at 6:03 AM PST on September 11

Even the expression from eyewitnesses seems dispassionate and detached.

*My entire workplace witnessed the 2nd plane crash. It looks like the first one hit near the top of the building with the antenna. The second circled around and hit the other building somewhere near the middle.*

Over time, as the reality of the situation emerges, expression becomes more emotional.

*i've spent the entire morning alternating between a state of mind-numbing shock and soul-twisting sadness...as i watch the news i see the city i used to call my playground covered in rubble and smoke...50,000+ dead because someone disagreed with an opinion our country had...and now i'm at work. trying to deal with this as people call me to tell me their computers are acting funny...\*sigh\**

*For today, after everything I've read and seen, I am completely shocked. I could never fathom what it was like to be in that building when this happened, or what it was like to be in those planes knowing that you were witnessing the end. Today will have an effect on our nation like nothing has ever before....Closure will not happen in my lifetime, my heart and tears go out to the victims families, I don't know what I could say...*  
posted by [samsara](#) at 3:04 PM PST on September 11<sup>59</sup>

Conversations like the one above were quickly replaced by the expression of initial emotions (disbelief, horror, and shock). This testifies to the speed with which information about the attacks was dispersed.

As initial expressions of disbelief and shock eventually gave way to less emotional and more deliberate dialogue, similar statements were still commonly found in Internet users' descriptions of where they were or what occurred in their lives on September 11, 2001. Below is an excerpt taken from one New Yorker's description of his day:

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<sup>59</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011216215020/www.metafilter.com/comments.mefi/10034>

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*I go to Williams and John street everyday for work. I arrived at the WTC N,R station just as I do everyday, headphones on, listening to The Avalanches. It was a beautiful, clear blue , cool pre-fall morning.*

*I felt the sonic boom go right through me, and then heard what sounded like a truck tire blowing out, ringing through the sandwiched buildings downtown, as I have heard many times before. I look up, and I see flames shooting out of the WTC #2, immediately followed by a stream of glass and paper, followed by several large, flaming pieces of projectile steel. It looked like a twisted parade. Shock took over, mixed with adrenaline. I, instinctively, along with everyone around me, ran like hell.*

*I get to my office lobby area, two blocks down, and thousands of pink, white and yellow letter-sized memo papers are just raining to the ground, all 4 edges of each burned away.*

*I get to the elevator, make it into the office, and everyone is on the 8th floor, gathered around 4 plasma screens, watching MSNBC. What I see on screen is just breathtaking. The World Trade Center Tower #2 is on fire. I stand in front of the screens in my office, watching what has been attached to my dream of being here for so long, burn away into the sky. I am in disbelief. I feel an overwhelming sense of deja vu...<sup>60</sup>*

### *Expression relating to sadness or a sense of loss*

By far the most common form of expression, statements of grief, sadness and condolence appeared on three-quarters of the Web sites in this study. These kinds of expressions even appeared on the Web sites of governments and corporations, sites usually devoid of any kind of expression. The examples below demonstrate how this subcategory appeared on various Web sites.

*"My heart is heavy with pain and my eyes fill with tears as I send the families of the victims this messege. I'm a US Marine and wish I could do something to ease your pain. I cannot even imagine how you all feel. My heart goes out to you all. I know in my heart that the people responsible for this action will be found and they will punished, if not by man, than by God. God be with you all. Texas hearts are with you. Adolfo, Jill & Emily"*

*"i live in Ireland as i watched the news unfold yesterday i could not belive that humen people could do this to others they must not be human when you think about it just evil. NYC and Washington are in my prayers for the people who died,who servived and all the people who have lost someone. for everyone in the USA ireland is praying for ye."*

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<sup>60</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011216212805/mystory.inter.net/browse.php?action=first>

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*"I am paralyzed by the horror and sadness of what has happened. It is beyond me to express the sadness and concern I feel for everyone who is suffering today. I am sending healing thoughts and energy out to everyone who cannot help but be changed by this and eventually made stronger in our resolve to stand together against such heinous, inhuman behavior.  
With Care, Trisha, ME USA"*

*"God Bless America our hearts ache for you all we stand with you in sorrow and prayer and wish we could do more. God will repay these people for what they have done just move in his wisdom and strenght God bless you all love from and english family of 17 we all stand with you the Clynch family."<sup>61</sup>*

Reading the expression above, it soon becomes obvious that these emotions are not limited to New Yorkers or even Americans. This online version of emotional support and empathy poured in from around the world. The official government Web sites for Canada and the Isle of Man both supplied an online guest book to allow their citizens to post messages for Americans and others to read. As in this example from Canada's guest book, these online structures were successful in facilitating interaction among citizens of the world.

*We are so sorry for your loss. We have shed many a tear this past week.*

Barbara&David Boyles - Cobble Hill, B.C. : 22:55:19 2001-09-16

*I would like ot send my deepest condolences to the United States of America in the midst of such dark times. If history has shown anything, it is that the USA has bounced back time after time after time, and will do so again, with the help of Canada, the United Kingdom, and the rest of the free world. God Bless America.*

John McLean - Calgary : 22:54:09 2001-09-16

*En mon nom et au nom de mes enfants, j'aimerais exprimer aux parents, amis, collègues de travail des victimes des attentats du 11 septembre 2001 mes plus sincères condoléances. Ayant plusieurs membres de ma famille qui résident aux États-Unis, dont certains sont des citoyens américains à part entière depuis de nombreuses années. En cet instant, la frontière qui nous séparent me semble bien futile, ces gens disparus le 11 septembre sont aussi mes compatriotes.*

Daniel Savard - Beloeil, Québec, Canada : 22:40:06 2001-09-16

*As an American as well as a New Yorker, I would like to thank the great people of Canada and all that they have done after that tragedy which occured last Tuesday...your prayers and support have uplifted us...you truly are great neighbors and friend! We are truly touched....and just saying thank you is not enough...I ask that you pray for all those rescue workers as well as the families of those that are still missing or are dead. Once again..thank you!*

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<sup>61</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011122101738/66.40.240.240/discus/messages/1825/2206.html?WednesdaySeptember1220010743pm>

*Spirituality/Religious references*

Appearing on over 60% of the Web sites analyzed, messages with religious or spiritual references included those with prayers, Biblical passages, and general references to God or Allah. While some messages focused on the religious overtones behind the attacks, more frequently the expression in this category suggested God as a sources of healing, referred to prayers made on behalf of those suffering, or asked that “God bless” America, the heroes, the victims and their families. The following quotes are taken from a message board open to the general public and hosted by a Web site dedicated to improving rescue and relief responses to disasters. These excerpts are representative of the religious expression that was present even on Web sites and message boards produced by secular entities.

By [salinarae](#) ( - 152.163.213.182) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 04:52 pm:

*I would like to seen my utmost condolences out to the family, and friends of the victims of this terrible tragedy. Remember look towards God. That is where true strength snd comfort come from.*

By [thornbls](#) ( - 66.68.150.96) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 06:28 pm:

*I would like to let all of the friends and family of the the victims know that my prayers are with you. Many of my friends are also praying. My heart is broken for all the pain and suffering this evil event has caused. But our God is a big God. You will see our country unified as never before. You will have help and support like you never thought possible. This country will and is rallying behind you and will for a long time to come.  
May God give you the strength and courage you need in the days to come. May He provide for ALL of your needs for you and your families.  
God Bless.*

By [Melissa Carver](#) ( - 209.45.185.9) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 06:49 pm:

*My prayers are with the victims and the families of this horrid event. God will take care of you and He will provide you with everything you need to get through this. Just have faith and remember that God loves you, just as your loved ones do, whom are looking down from heaven.*<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Quotes from:

[http://web.archive.org/web/20010917033147/http://www.gg.ca/books/us-attack/index\\_e.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20010917033147/http://www.gg.ca/books/us-attack/index_e.html)

<sup>63</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20020816131524/http://66.40.240.240/discus/messages/1825/2021.html?MondayDecember3120011058am>

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*Anger, fear, hate*

These types of expression are present on just over half of the Web sites surveyed. Though somewhat similar to statements about shock and disbelief, expression of anger, fear and hate appeared on Web sites in vastly different forms ranging from anger towards the terrorists and fear of more attacks to fear of discrimination and hate crimes against Arab Americans or Muslims. In addition, these kinds of expressions were also directed at Americans and other Internet users who posted unpopular or controversial proclamations on the Internet.

In this example from a personal Web log, or blog, the author describes his experience with the new climate of racial tension after the attacks. Notably, after posting this story, he received over 250 responses from site visitors, which offers some indication of how large an audience some expression on the Internet reached.

*Wednesday, September 12*

***God dammit, I'm Canadian***

*I was doing better today, until a short while ago when I was at a cafe for breakfast. As I stood in line, someone (very loudly and in a very accusing tone) asked: "Are you from Afghanistan??" All eyes turned upon me, burning, each one accompanied with accusatory frowns. Needless to say, I very sheepishly said: "I am not from Afghanistan.", then I quietly left ... with an empty stomach and almost crying.*

*I felt so small and I now feel so unsafe and uncomfortable.*

*(thank you **all** for your kind comments, emails, phone calls, virtual hugs .... the support has been nothing short of amazing.)*

*[[link](#) | [257 comments](#)]<sup>64</sup>*

In the next example, from a Web site dedicated to “uncovering media myths about the Middle East,” the site producer has posted a letter to the public expressing apprehension, fear and gratitude over the messages sent to him since September 11. Here, anger, fear and hate are present in both the author’s expression and several other examples that the author has excerpted from messages he received.

*It is extremely hard to write this morning, and yet I feel I have to. Everything hurts so much. After a few hours sleep, I woke up in the dark, hoping and praying that I had woken up from a nightmare. The nightmare is still there. Today, as dawn breaks over New York City and the country, we will start to come face to face with the enormous tragedy and crime that struck yesterday, and we will begin to learn of countless thousands of families whose loved ones have been ripped from them. They have will have names and faces. It is beyond*

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<sup>64</sup> Quote from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20010920170801/http://jish.nu/>

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*imagination and comprehension...I hope too that Americans will maintain their humanity and not surrender to their basest feelings as understandable anger, frustration and grief rise. Arabs and Muslims in America now live with real fear and apprehension. From early yesterday morning, I began receiving to my website, as well as to the email of the Arab American Action Network messages that only deepened the pain of the day.*

*"You are going to feel the wrath of all Americans. LEAVE this country while you can. ALL ARABS ARE COWARDS AND BARBARIANS. DEATH TO ALL ARABS ALL PERSIANS ALL MUSLIMS!!!!!!" wrote Darrell Hawley, adding for good measure that Arabs, Muslims and "Persians" "deserve nothing less than extermination."*

*"Pay back time...will come soon," was the simple message from REise99@aol.com.*

*Doug asked "Ali, why do your people love when civilians are killed. You are Evil."*

*"Dear dirty towel-heads," wrote Brook Shuler, "Please take your illogical, misogynistic and murdering religion back to the Middle East. We have tolerated you disgusting people long enough in our country." Brook added "I hope the US wipes out every man, women and child Arab in the middle east. You people, like the AIDS virus, are a disease of this world. I will rest more easily when all of you are dead."*

*This is just a sampling of what I received. While I am fortunate to have received only words of hate, I fear others may be victims of much worse. But this is not the whole story, and this is not the America I know and that I was born in that is speaking. What made a far greater impression on me were the many messages of support from friends and strangers.<sup>65</sup>*

#### *Critical analysis -- advocating a military or non-violent response*

As the emotional fervor after the attacks subsided, less emotional and more analytical material began to appear. The willingness of Internet users to share their views on the reasons for the attacks and the motives of the attacks also increased over time and the number of statements advocating U.S. military reprisals diminished somewhat. Overall, expression advocating a nonviolent U.S. response or self-restraint appeared on 35% of the Web sites. Comments advocating a military response or vengeance appeared on 25% of the sites. Statements discussing the reasons for the attack appeared steadily after the first few days and overall were found on nearly 40% of the Web sites. Examples from each of these three categories are below.

In the case of critical analysis, authors examine various possible scenarios to explain the attacks and attempting to place them in a larger political picture. These messages can be identified by their rational or intellectual focus, and often lack emotional substance. Messages like this were common in the weeks following the attacks as individuals sought to answer questions like "why did it happen?" and "who is responsible?" In this example

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<sup>65</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011107144305/abunimah.org/features/010912words.html>



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the author grapples with these larger questions and particularly with the question of “why?”

*...The World Trade Centre was not just another tall building; it was a symbol of America's economic pre-eminence. The other target was the Pentagon, symbol of America's military might. By attacking and destroying or crippling the two symbols of America's economic and military power, the terrorists proved the point that America was as vulnerable as any other nation. No matter what security arrangements the US government takes, its enemies can still manage to strike at will and at a place and time of their choice...*<sup>66</sup>

Expression advocating immediate military action or revenge for the attacks often focused on Osama bin Laden and his supporters as primary targets. Other times, messages urged violence against Muslims or Afghanistan as a whole. In contrast, other messages advocating a nonviolent response stressed the need for America not to lash out blindly at innocent people. Frequently, as in this example, messages supporting these oppositional responses to the 9/11 attacks are often found near each other on message boards.

By [KILL OMASA](#) ( - 151.202.50.200) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 10:04 am:

*I AM A LEBANESE CATHOLIC AMERICAN AND I FEEL THAT PALESTINIAN MUSLIMS SHOULD BE GATHERED UP AND FREAKIN SHOT. THEY MAKE THE MIDDLE EAST LOOK LIKE AN ANIMAL HABITAT. I HAVE LOST A FAMILY MEMBER AND A GREAT PERSON IN THIS HORRIFIC ACT OF DISGUST. PLEASE DO NOT LUMP THE LEBANESE AMERICANS WITH THESE BARBARIANS THAT DARE CALL THEMSELVES HOLY!!!*

By [bethy](#) ( - 209.214.123.54) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 03:31 pm:

*We should not harbor any ill feelings toward Muslim Americans. We all live in this great country for a reason. Race should not become an issue EVER.*

By [Lydia](#) ( - 64.148.146.162) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 06:53 pm:

*Please keep calm heads, everyone is full of anger, it is hard to understand who could be full of that much hate, could be so full rage, how someone can be so brain washed to do such a thing. Enough people have suffered. Please don't turn your anger into the same thing that cause this by miss directing it against our neighbors and co-workers. We all know that God had nothing to do with this. Another force was at work here. Making threats against all Arab people will not*

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<sup>66</sup> Quote from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20020815101910/http://66.40.240.240/discus/messages/1825/2037.html?MondaySeptember2420010623pm>

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*help. Only hurt. Please, please don't make this horrible thing that happened any worse. Peace*<sup>67</sup>

### *Patriotism*

Following the attacks, much was made of America's renewed sense of patriotism. Familiar songs like "God Bless America" and "America the Beautiful" took the place of popular music on the airwaves and nearly 32% of American adults displayed a flag outside their homes within 48 hours of the attacks, according to a Pew Internet Project survey. The online world saw its share of digital expressions of patriotism. Virtual patriotism in the form of expressions appeared online both in traditional slogans such as "God bless America" or "United We Stand" and as the primary subject of expression. The following example, taken from a Web site created for the purpose of memorializing the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, shows how of patriotism appeared in expression on the Web.

*This past week, everytime I have come across an American flag, it has brought tears to my eyes. Tears of sorrow, anger, but mostly patriotism. I love this country. Always have the entire 18 years of my life. Despite all the criticism that America has received in the past, both from afar and within, the world remains in total shock, for America, the home of the proud and the free, has been violently struck at this past week. I think of it as a flesh wound. Sure, it looks bad presently; it hurts, stings, makes you want to cry. But it will eventually heal, leaving a scar as a remembrance, for we can never forget this tragedy. The terrorists this past week, and anyone out there who dares to attack America must know that you can't destroy the her heart; it has been wounded, but with the spirit of America pumping though it, it will never perish.*

*In the meantime though, we're going to seek out those cowards who wounded us from afar, raise them up for the whole world to see, and crush them into dust. Being in the Naval Reserves, I know my time may come where I may have to go off and fight a war. To protect the greatest country on earth, I'd go anywhere and do just about anything. God bless you all. I'm so proud to be an American.*<sup>68</sup>

Online expression also encouraged people to show their patriotism through offline actions such as dressing in red, white, and blue, displaying the flag, donating money, and giving blood. Another appeal to patriotism focused on encouraging Americans to return to their 'normal' lives and not be defeated by fear. On one particular Web site, "Betting on America," the site producers urge visitors to be good Americans by "**by going about our lives without the fear** that the events of September 11th helped to put there."

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<sup>67</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011125164555/66.40.240.240/discus/messages/1825/1869.html?MondayNovember1220011221pm>

<sup>68</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20010925100316/www.worldtradecentermemorial.com/IMSmessageboard.html>

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Messages in the guest book concur that “Terrorism only works if you are afraid...” and encourage people to continue traveling, working and investing in America.<sup>69</sup>

### *Misuse/Abuse of Web Sites*

The final category of expression, the misuse and/or abuse of Web sites, appeared on less than 10% of the Web sites analyzed in this study. This subtype refers to expression that is either inappropriate to the context or purpose of a Web site or abuses the privilege provided by site producers by ignoring their intent for allowing public expression on the Web. Examples include entering false identities into victim’s registries or trying to solicit business on memorial message boards among others. Both obvious and subtle forms of abuse and misuse provide information about how some Internet users took advantage of this sudden opportunity to create expression. However, it is impossible to know how much attempted abuse or misuse was stopped by site producers who removed inappropriate expression before it reached the public.

This first example of abuse involves a Web site whose original intent was to allow visitors to ‘pay their respects to the victims’ by lighting a virtual memorial candle. Visitors also had the option of including their name or a brief message underneath the candle. Some of the posted expression, as in the following examples “*Melissa Woodruff, God Bless All*”; “*In loveing memory Off 911 day love amber*”; “*To the courageous who gave their lives*”, reflected the site owner’s intent. Other captions represent abuse of the opportunity to post expression provided by this Web site. Examples of abusive expression include, “*NUKE OSAMA + SADDAM + CASTRO NOW !!!!!*”, “*NEVER AGAIN~PRE-EMPTIVELY NUKE OSAMA NOW*”, “*NUKE TALIBAN DRUG TRAFFICKING TERRORISTS*”, “*USSCOLE+ EMBASSIES+WTC+ PENTAGON+PA =OSAMA*”, “*BUY GUNS+SUVS+DEFENSE STOCKS INVEST USA*”, “*FRANCE WILL NUKE GREENPEACE TERRORISTS*”, “*GREENPEACE=OSAMA MONEY LAUNDERING FRONT*”.<sup>70</sup>

These later postings refer both to relevant (Osama) and irrelevant (Greenpeace) parties and some may find the content of these messages objectionable. However, it is the context in which this expression is found, on a memorial Web site, which makes it abuse/misuse and not the content of the expression in general.

A final example of misuse found on the message boards of the Disaster Center, similarly involves the posting of expression inappropriate to the context. This time, while the content of the message, a family seeking loved ones, may not be objectionable, it is nonetheless inappropriate to the context of a message board on which it was posted.

*By [cooks](#) ( - 208.232.164.3) on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 - 05:29 pm:*

*Our prayers go out to the victims and their families. We must come together as a nation to defend our freedom. We MUST pray for our leaders at this time. They need wisdom and guidance in what they are preparing to do.*

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<sup>69</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web1.archive.org/web/20011101020040/www.bettingonamerica.com/>

<sup>70</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web1.archive.org/web/20011004215734/lightacandle.sol.dk/>

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*If you have any information on Daphne Pouletsos of Westwood, NJ. Please call 800-999-0904 ext 4667  
She was on the 103rd floor of the southern tower at the WTC at the time of the attack. We have not heard from her. Family is worried sick.<sup>71</sup>*

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<sup>71</sup> Quotes from:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011214233253/66.40.240.240/discus/messages/1825/2115.html?WednesdaySeptember1220010631pm>

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## **Part 7**

### **Images of September 11<sup>th</sup> on the Web**

**By Meghan Dougherty**  
**University of Washington, Department of Communication**

**A “Webscape” of examples for this section can be found at:**  
<http://september11.archive.org/webscape/dou/>

#### ***Key Findings***

A substantial proportion of the Web sites ran pictures and drawings related to the 9/11 terror attacks and their aftermath. It is likely that no event in the era of the Web has so dominated the visual imagery of the online world. The abundance, variety, and power of these images helped shape global reaction to the event. Images provided Internet users a means to navigate through 9/11-related Web sites – many with strong emotional responses – that developed in the aftermath of the tragedy.

A sampling of 187 Web sites of all kinds – search engines, portals, sites focused on news, those run by government agencies, those that serve civic and community groups, those built by individuals, those devoted to spiritual and religious content, those created for scholarly pursuits, those of multinational corporations, and those created by schools – shows that 38% ran images of 9/11 events in the days and weeks after the attacks.

Six distinct types of images dominated the online environment:

- Informative images – many of which were first captured in news of the attacks
- Memorial images – which were often used to acknowledge the tragedy and show support for victims and rescuers
- Signpost images – which were images placed on all kinds of Web sites to show recognition of the importance of 9/11 events even though the function of those Web sites was unrelated to news or memorials (such as e-commerce sites)
- Storytelling images – which often were bunched together to show how certain elements of the 9/11 story were unfolding
- Supplemental images – which often accompanied heartfelt written commentary about the meaning of the attacks or the appropriate way to respond to them
- Logos – which were designed to capture some emotional aspect of a Web designer’s response to the ongoing story.

#### ***Background: Images on the Web***

Web producers use images to convey ideas and highlight features of their sites. After 9/11, people sought out places to grieve, to argue, and to memorialize, as well as to obtain news and information. And many Web sites added images related to 9/11 events in a way that established a global symbol system that helped Web surfers understand the events in a more meaningful way. The Internet had joined the ranks of television, and

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become a place where people could participate in a shared experience. The common imagery of this symbol system allowed surfers to cope with their emotions together.

Walter Benjamin wrote of the history of photography: “It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography.... [T]he aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty.”<sup>72</sup> Images have long been cherished as reminders of those past. However, they are not replacements. An image is a record of a fleeting moment that recalls memories of a past existence. In the weeks following September 11<sup>th</sup>, Web sites and their images captured the fleeting expressions of Web surfers and site producers as they grieved and memorialized those lost in the attacks.

Portraits comprised a large number of the images that could be found online after 9/11. But that was not the only photographic form that was being used. Images of changed landmarks, and even drawn graphics of patriotic symbols were also widely used. In the weeks following the attacks people felt the need to act. Many wanted to be directly involved, but not all could participate on such a tangible level. The Web provided a forum for these people to share their personal creative remembrances in the form of drawings and stories.

Benjamin also notes that images have political significance.<sup>73</sup> “[Pictures] begin to put up signposts for [the viewer], right ones or wrong ones; no matter...captions have become obligatory. And it is clear that they have an altogether different character than the title of a painting.” Images call up ideas in viewers regardless of the intention of the image creator. To be clear signposts of specific content, images must be clearly defined or be accompanied by captions to guide the viewer.

The images of 9/11 events and their aftermath were obviously posted to convey important symbols and meanings to viewers. The images used were largely images of Ground Zero at the pile debris at the site of the collapsed World Trade Center towers, rescue workers, victims, and patriotic graphics. These images had plain meanings that were used as “signposts,” or directional cues for Internet surfers. The images on the Web sometimes stood alone, but they were often accompanied by some text, or referent helping to guide the viewer.

### ***Research design***

Sites chosen for this study enabled users to post and/or read other people’s postings about 9/11. They included features such as message boards, Web-site polls, or Web-logs. The sample ultimately contained Web sites that represented a wide range of site producers, including religious, community, individual, portal, etc. Digital images were defined broadly to include photographs digitized for display on the Web, and graphics that have been drawn, or photographs that have been manipulated to reflect a 9/11 theme for display on the Web. Examples of images with a 9/11 theme included but were not limited

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<sup>72</sup> Arendt, H. (Ed.). (1968). *Illuminations*; Walter Benjamin. New York: Schocken Books, p. 226.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

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to an American flag, an eagle, a hand-drawn graphic of the New York City skyline, and related objects.

### *The use of visual language*

Of the 187 sites included in the sample, 38% contained images with some sort of 9/11 theme. Of the sites that included images, the most widely used were representations of the buildings damaged in the attacks, snapshots of memorials around the world, and portraits of those lost and of those helping in the recovery efforts. Web memorials were most frequently associated with images of people; most often memorials appeared on the Web as digital photograph galleries or a collection of images with little or no explanation or textual references.

The images found in the analysis fell into six different categories. They were meant to provide information, to memorialize, to act as “signposts” for 9/11-related content, to tell stories, to supplement textual expression, or to reflect organizations’ acknowledgement of the tragedy.

### *Informative*

Images were used to convey information in a format that was readily accessible and easily understood. Informative images enabled Web surfers to understand the what, when, and where of the attacks. Images provided a quick glance at the most basic information.

Many sites posted screenshots from international and national news organizations’ television broadcasts and Webcasts. The Eötvös University Media Department offered a site, “America Under Attack – Live,” archiving live news broadcasts, Web pages, and printed press front pages

(<http://web1.archive.org/web/20011001120200/emc.elte.hu/~hargitai/wtcmemorial/>)

Scroll down through the page to see still images of broadcast news reports, and printed press front pages. The story of September 11th can be seen through these informative images from major news organizations. Recognizable images were used to tell the story visually.

### *Memorials*

Many Web sites were posted as memorial pages using images as stamps of acknowledgement and support. Like yellow ribbons to support the troops, and pink ribbons to support the fight against breast cancer, red, white, and blue ribbons were created as a reminder and a memorial of the September 11<sup>th</sup> events. Some Web pages were posted as a repository for memorial images to be downloaded by other site producers for display on Web sites. Remember.worldatwar.org developed an “Internet Remembrance Campaign” dedicating part of the Web site as an image repository for site producers to find and take memorializing 9/11-themed images for display on their own Web sites:

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20011101183348/remember.worldatwar.org/main.mhtml/ima>

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[ges](#). Site visitors were encouraged to add to the collection with their own commemorative, or memorial images.

As a centerpiece, the Internet Remembrance Campaign site offered commemorative graphic images ready for download by Web site producers. As explained on the site, these images were created as an invitation to “...place one of the ribbon images on your site, and consider the fragility of life and give thought to the merits of understanding and compassion.” Commemorative graphics integrated the date, yellow ribbons, and photographs from Ground Zero.

Similar Web sites used text as memorials, recalling personal stories accompanied by graphics created for Web display. Many of these images combined a number of representations of patriotic and memorial imagery digitally to convey a sense of remembrance through image. Display of memorial images necessarily associated a site producer with a desire to remember and memorialize those lost on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

### *Signposts*

Various post 9/11 sites did not dedicate entire sites or pages to 9/11 information or memorial, but rather offered limited information along with previously posted, and unrelated content. Images were used on these Web sites as “signposts” to set this material off from unrelated content. These images served as quick reference points for users, guiding them to and through 9/11-related content. One such site offered a variety of news and information in the weeks following September 11th. Simple graphics of an American flag were used to set 9/11-related information off from the rest of the unrelated content on the site:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011001194031/lawandeverythingelse.com/>

Similar sites used this kind of “signpost” imagery to set the page off from other non-9/11 themed sites on the Internet. For example, several news sites were created in the weeks following September 11<sup>th</sup>. These sites were dedicated to displaying only 9/11-related news stories. Many of these sites used imagery to set themselves apart from other general news sites.

### *Storytelling*

Photographic essays were a popular type of expression on the post-9/11 Web. Images tend to verify circumstances; seeing is believing. Many sites in the post-9/11 Web displayed images to confirm the details that were hard to believe. The ThankYou Photo Gallery site producers posted a message of apology for the lack of photo credit information: <http://web.archive.org/web/20010922005926/thankyou.fast-networks.net/>. Users were submitting photographs to the site faster than could be displayed or verified for authorship. This site displayed primarily images of memorial vigils that developed around the world. This collection of memorial themed images told a story of remembrance rituals shared worldwide. The ThankYou Image Gallery is a collection of



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photographs submitted to the site producer by site users. Most, if not all of the four pages of images are memorial images from around the world.

Other sites posted images to show the outpouring of shared sympathy and support. Some of these sites featured only images. Site producers posted images without captions or explanation, allowing the images to speak for themselves. Digital photograph galleries appeared on the Web following themes of event sequence, memorial, critique and commentary, etc.

### *Supplemental*

Individuals used the Internet as a place to express themselves in the wake of the attacks. Many users who had created Web-logs prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> to post everyday quips used their sites as a place for remembering, grieving, and supporting or arguing. “A Day in the Life” is a personal Web-log site where the producer posts journal entries on a regular basis:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20011001193811/geocities.com/freddie72/911.html>.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, this site featured a page dedicated to those lost in the attacks. The site producer presents a letter to users recalling his memories of New York City before September 11<sup>th</sup> and reflects on his feeling about the tragedy. Embedded in his text is a now well-known image of firefighters raising an American flag at Ground Zero.

This image reinforces the message that the content on the page is dedicated as a memorial to those who lost their lives, as well as those helping in the recovery efforts. The image itself refers back to the historic photograph of the flag raising at Iwo Jima, calling up notions of patriotism and strength and stamina. Many site producers used these types of resonant images to solidify and strengthen their textual expressions on the Web.

### *Logos*

Site producers developed new logos and changed old logos to incorporate a 9/11 theme to signify their acknowledgement of the tragedy. A community Web site called “afterchaos” featured a page titled, “Give Life, Give Love, Give Blood - take a stand against world terrorism!” in the weeks following the attacks:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20010925191400/afterchaos.com/>. This page is introduced by an image that incorporated the Red Cross logo with a digital photograph of the falling towers. Other producers created and displayed image logos specifically for their pages, to identify their sites as 9/11-themed. Logos were also altered to show organizations that had strong ties to the effects of the attacks or the subsequent recovery efforts.

Site producers took this time of redefinition following September 11<sup>th</sup> to have new meaning connected to their images by rearranging logos. Site producers attempted to distinguish their sites as featuring 9/11 content from the rest of the Internet by using graphical logos with some 9/11 themes.