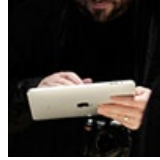


CADE METZ

11.01.12 03:30 PM

# Google Outage: Six Minutes of Terror



A GOOGLE SCREENSHOT TAKEN DURING SIX MINUTES OF PANIC ON WEDNESDAY.

AT ABOUT 10:47p.m. British time on Wednesday, Paul O'Brien couldn't reach Google. At all.

"Strange," he said, with a [post to Twitter](#). "My phone just completely lost connectivity to all Google services. Anyone else?"

The response was immediate. "Same here in Mexico," said [someone who calls himself orb3000](#), who tells us he does work at Veracruz State University. "All google services are out..."

Here at the Wired newsroom in San Francisco, we saw much the same thing. "Gmail, Drive, Reader...everything is down for me," wrote one reporter on our communal chat system, and soon countless others were complaining as well. "It's a good thing we're not beholden to google or anything for our digital lives," said one particularly sarcastic type.

Then, six minutes later, Google was back.

During those six minutes, about 10 percent of people trying to reach a long list of Google services were unable to do so, according to statement from the company. "We apologize to everyone affected and have worked hard to get our services back to normal as quickly as possible," the company said.

Google declined to discuss the matter further. But this massive outage – however brief – shows how tenuous our "digital lives" can be. And how much we're dependent on Google in particular. Google has gone to [extreme lengths](#) to minimize outages. But it too is fallible, and clearly, multiple services can go down in the event of an engineering mistake, technical malfunction, or natural disaster.

It appears that Google's search engine stayed up – as did its ad system – but nowadays, Google is far more than a search and ad company. According to the company's "Apps Dashboard" – where it tracks the health of so many of its services – the outage affected Gmail, Google Calendar, Google Drive, Google Documents, Google Spreadsheets, Google Talk, Google Presentations, Google Drawings, Google Sites, Google Video for business, Google Groups, and other services.

Many of these are used for personal reasons, but they're also used by businesses. And though not everyone uses all of them, many of these services have an enormous footprint. Google says its suite of online Apps spans 40 million active users and over 4 million businesses.

There's a case to be made for spreading your digital life across more than one company. But the truth of the matter is that most Google users are addicted to the convenience of using so many of those services in tandem. There's a single sign-in. You can so easily search for stuff. So much of it is free. And so on. The fact of the matter is that millions will continue to put many of their eggs in Google's basket – and hope the company can take care of them.

Google will say that in the grand scheme of things, Wednesday's outage was but a blip. The company's terms of service

now promises business that its online tools will be available 99.9 percent of the time, and in 2010, the company says, Gmail's uptime topped 99.984 percent – a rather impressive feat. But even Google's vaunted infrastructure is less than perfect.

What we can say is that Google seems to have made some significant progress since September 2009, when Gmail was completely offline for an hour and 40 minutes. It was the largest in a long series of outages over the course of many months, and since then, we've yet to see an outage of that magnitude – though Gmail was down for hour for about 5.7 million people in April of this year.

Amid the 2009 incident, we published a story here at Wired titled "Gmail Suffers Outage, World Ends." And Google Gmail guru Todd Jackson later told us that a printout of this story was posted on a wall somewhere inside the company. Yes, the headline was hyperbole. But it's worth remembering.

Michael Calore contributed to this story.

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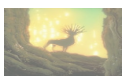
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