IT BLOGWATCH
By Richi Jennings, Computerworld

NEWS ANALYSIS

Skype still down today after supernode outage

Is Skype still down? Not any longer -- for most users. The Skype outage is over, apart from a few hiccups, thanks to some hastily installed mega-supernodes.

Skype logo

By Richi Jennings. December 23, 2010.

After yesterday's widespread 'supernode' outage Skype is still down for many users today. While there's still little clarity about what went wrong, in IT Blogwatch, bloggers join the dots.

Your humble blogwatcher curated these bloggy bits for your entertainment. Not to mention *Comic Sans Criminal -- There's help available for people like you!..*

(EBAY)

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Elizabeth Heichler 'splains:

> The Skype network uses what it calls "supernodes" which act as directories for finding users online. ... Many of these supernodes were taken offline by a problem affecting some versions of Skype.
>
> ...
>
> The company noted that "Enterprise products including Skype Connect and Skype Manager continue to function normally." Reliably serving paying corporate customers is ... key to the success of the company, which is preparing for an initial public offering.

Aunty's 'Mother' Maggie Shiels adds:

> Users as far afield as Japan, Europe and the US have all reported problems. The company ... last suffered a major outage in 2007. ... Tony Bates, Skype chief executive officer ... did not ... rule out the possibility of a malicious attack.
>
> ...
>
> He estimated that as a result of the outage, Skype has lost around 10 million calls ... [saying] normal call volume for the time of day would be 20m.

Skype's Peter Parkes picks a peck:

> Under normal circumstances, there are a large number of supernodes available. ... As Skype relies on being able to maintain contact with supernodes, it may appear offline for some of you.
>
> ...
>
> Our engineers are creating new mega-supernodes as fast as they can, which should gradually return things to normal. ... We sincerely apologise for the disruption to your conversations.

And Dan York speculates on the underlying problem:

> Supernodes [are] Skype clients that are on the public Internet and*not* behind a firewall or NAT ... that broker the communication between two Skype clients. ... If you are running Skype on a computer - and you are *not* behind a firewall, there is a chance that*your computer* could become a supernode. That's just how Skype works.
>
> ...
>
> Every Skype client is connected out to a supernode ... [and] the supernodes are then connected to each other... creating Skype's globally distributed directory database. ... If a supernode goes down, Skype clients will simply attach to another supernode.
>
> ...
>
> My guess would be that there ... [were] "cascading failures" in this scenario. ... Say, a software update affecting some supernodes ... those supernodes dropped offline, the increased load of Skype clients trying to connect to online supernodes might have caused some of them to then drop offline. Or when a supernode came back online, it may have been overwhelmed by the quantity of connection requests and soon failed again.

Phil Wolff suggests a simpler answer:

> Why were 20 million people kicked off the Skype network? Too few supernodes in the wild to meet holiday demand.
>
> ...
>
> Skype is deploying Skype mega-supernodes to fix the problem.

But Nick Farrell says it's still broken this morning, at least in Europe:

> 24 hours later and we still can't connect to our fearless news editor, who has been forced into the pub for an early liquid lunch.
>
> Skype has always been seen as a fairly stable voice over IP outfit and is currently trying to market itself to businesses on that basis. With mega outages like this it should probably forget that.

Meanwhile, Allen Stern is "really mad":

> First thing I plan to do is DEMAND A REFUNDoh wait :-P

And Finally...

Comic Sans Criminal -- There's help available for people like you!

[hat tip: Hacker News]

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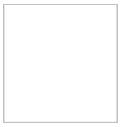

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You can also read Richi's full profile and disclosure of his industry affiliations.

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