

The Strategy Behind Fortnite's Season X Finale Blackout — MatthewBall.vc

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5-6 minutes

This essay originated as Tweetstorm, though I've also produced it via text here:

1/ [#Fortnite](#) has now been down for 20 hours, during a national holiday, seemingly by design + with no explanation. Even though it is the paragon of an always-on, live service. To answer why, important to consider what was (A) necessary; (B) decided by Epic; and (C) leaned into

2/ Necessary: Changing maps likely meant Epic would have to fundamentally overhaul their server infrastructure, which involves patching many thousands of individual units. This means downtime, and not a short one

3/ Decided: Epic could have done this overnight when usage was low (e.g. 1-8AM), on a weekday (not a Holiday Sunday), or regionally. Instead, they did the exact opposite - and led audiences to believe a specific must-watch event was going to happen.

4/ Decided: Epic also could have communicated their needs: "Hey give us 24 hours, back at XX:YY"... or *something*, *anything* Instead, they've deliberately played it up - random numbers, minigames, plastering social accounts with black screens.

5/ Decided: It's also likely that Epic is now done with the patching. 20 was hours probably enough. It's now offline just for fun (they definitely loved watching streamers just flip out and perform to a black screen for hours) So we get into the lean-into.

6/ Lean Into: So Epic/Fortnite knew it would be down for a while because of the significance of the change (a new map), decided to weave it into the narrative (the black hole) and then decided to eventize it via elongation and a total lack of communication (plus cryptic trolling)

7/ Why do this? This is a media playbook. Season X is Fortnite's "Avengers: Endgame". You build it up with suspense, and after go radio silent to build up anticipation. Monocultural events require live, synchronous experiences - which need to be "shaped" or "produced"

8/ Duration + lack of comms driving MASSIVE marketing promo from press. Compare how "world's most popular game still missing" is being covered and by whom vs. "had long pre-scheduled downtime" NYT wouldn't promote Fortnite going MIA for 3hrs yesterday. Still MIA day later is key

9/ Plus viral audience growth stemming from ever-more people tuning in on every social net "just to see" what on earth is happening. Fortnite's playtime and viewing hours definitely down from Q1/2, but most of its "decline" is just because the press/pop culture obsession moved on

10/ This massively reiterates game's heft, importance + "still here" And the last thing Epic wants is the normalization of "ok, yep new season let's try it out" (we are on Season 10). Problem solved. Very clear even disengaged users need to be here for Chapter 2. At its start.

11/ This is far more important than lost revenue during 1-2 days, especially given the massive influx of new commerce it'll generate when it returns

12/ (Yes there were some proper outages with Epic Game launcher, but this is probably because many confused users simultaneously disconnected and reconnected, which isn't how systems design for scaling)

13/ So proof of Epic's brilliance; Fortnite's distinctiveness (not only is there no real story - not even the island - the story is now game itself); its cultural force (they reiterated popularity by... going away); the fact Epic's live ops team really is the best in the world

14/ Fortnite does minor patches for the world's highest concurrency game, across every imaginable platform, across the entire world, with numerous languages, on such a regular cadence and with so few problems none of us notice it unless they *fake* an outage

15/ Whenever MMOs do a major update there are betas, downtimes, and so on When Blizzard launched a 15 year-old game (WoW Classic) on a single platform (PC), it faced hourlong login waits Fortnite Chap 2 is like a several major updates to modern WoW all rolled into one.

16/ When Fortnite comes back up, it'll have a few hiccups given languages/concurrency/changes/cross-platform/global availability (+hack attempts), but the mere fact they've turned downtime + ops into a cultural event + customer acquisition... is crazy. And by *not* doing things

17/ One other perk: Epic can use this time to work on "technical debt" and make other updates/changes that aren't strictly related to Fortnite Chapter 2, similar to how transportation authorities use a tunnel closure or critical repair to also make non-essential changes and repairs too.

18/ And remember! Fortnite wasn't even built to be an ever-changing Battle Royale game, let alone a [metaverse](#). Epic is no doubt elated at the opportunity to modernize its tech without needing to worry about moment-to-moment user issues

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