

# Balsillie: BlackBerry Shutdown Will Never Happen Again

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Research in Motion co-CEO Jim Balsillie said the BlackBerry shutdown last month was caused by a process error and the problem has been "unambiguously solved."

In a rare one-on-one interview with eWEEK, Research in Motion co-CEO Jim Balsillie said that the event that shut down e-mail for BlackBerrys in the United States for hours last month was due to "a process thing," and that steps had been taken to ensure that it could never happen again.

Balsillie said that the improbable combination of events, which included the failure of a minor software upgrade to a caching subsystem, the failure of the failover system and the subsequent overloading of a second system has been fixed.

"It was a process error that we had that's been fixed. It shouldn't have happened, and it won't happen again," Balsillie said. "It wasn't a corruption of any form of the infrastructure, and that's very important."

"We're clearly putting a lot more fault tolerance into the system, a lot more capacity. We're having domain failover architectures; we're having business continuity solutions experts, so from that component piece of the infrastructure, that's not going to happen again."

Explaining that the problem that caused the blackout was totally avoidable, Balsillie said that the company is broadening, strengthening

and "fault tolerating" the system. "It's a global and public safety imperative," he said, adding that there is no constraint on budget or resources for this work.

Balsillie did note, however, that it's the responsibility of an enterprise to make sure they have continuity plans for times when important communications paths, including the BlackBerry e-mail, are out of order. He pointed out that RIM was working with customers immediately upon learning of the blackout.

"We had literally hundreds of our top customers on open bridges with ongoing collaboration and communications. So those that were affected had ongoing communications," he said about RIM's support efforts.

Balsillie said that the critical public safety portions of RIMs customer base were brought back on line immediately. "Then the consumer portion was brought back, also quickly, but subsequently," he said.

The question of a failover data center had been discussed after the blackout, especially by government managers who were concerned about losing a vital communications link. Balsillie said that now there is a failover center, but he will not disclose its location.

He said that the same process problem that caused the blackout also delayed the failover, but he said that RIM was still able to get critical users back on line almost immediately. "There is another hub going in the U.S. across the fault line," Balsillie added.

"There are also architecture failovers and dual homing plans for key secret service, government and security forces," Balsillie said. "We can view this as a mistake or we can view it as an inoculation. It's unambiguously solved."

Balsillie noted that the U.S. government is RIM's biggest customer, which is one reason he's taking the issue of the blackout so seriously. He said that BlackBerry devices are used across the whole range of government organizations from intelligence agencies to the military to law enforcement.

"It's part of a broad, broad system of capability. It's shifting to mission critical in every sense of the word," he said.

On other topics, Balsillie said that he thinks that telephony integration is the "coolest" thing he's seen at the RIM symposium.

"It was considered in many respects unsolvable, but it's so obvious and so powerful," he said, "it's not unlike when we did e-mail. People said why would I want e-mail on my belt, but it changed everything. Once the telephony is synchronized, it totally changes the collaboration world and once that's interrelated with your other workflow and messaging, it changes everything."

Balsillie also hailed the popularity of navigation for the BlackBerry, noting that when people are mobile, knowing where they are can be very important. "After messaging and talking, it's the most horizontal application. By definition, mobile people have location needs," he said.

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