

Googlefail! The Web reacts to virtual traffic jam

May 20 2009, By Elise Ackerman



Google logo

What would life be like without Google? Last week 83 million people found out.

"The world basically stopped this morning for me," Richard Treharne wrote in a May 14 post on Twitter, the microblogging site.

Google users from Copenhagen to California [had difficulty accessing Google](#) and its numerous Web services, including YouTube, Gmail, [Google Docs](#), [Google Maps](#) and Google Reader. In some cases, the sites were slow. In others, they didn't load at all.

In a blog post, Urs Hoelzle, senior vice president for operations, said "an error in one of our systems caused us to direct some of our [Web traffic](#) through Asia, which created a traffic jam."

Hoelzle said the problem, which started at 7:48 a.m. and lasted about two hours, affected 14 percent of Google's 597 million users.

"We've been working hard to make our services ultrafast and 'always on,' so it's especially embarrassing when a glitch like this one happens," Hoelzle said. "We're very sorry that it happened, and you can be sure that we'll be working even harder to make sure that a similar problem won't happen again."

The outage frustrated many, provoked anxiety in some and inspired wit in a few.

"Googlefail is just a conspiracy to prevent us from knowing the truth about Swineflu," Greg Pettigrew wrote in a Twitter post.

This is the second major glitch Google has suffered this year.

On Jan. 31, people attempting to do a Google search between 6:30 a.m. and 7:25 a.m. Pacific time got results marked with a warning "this site may harm your computer."

Marissa Mayer, vice president of search products, said the problem was a simple human error: Someone importing a list of sites suspected of carrying [malware](#) had introduced a typo.

Dmitri Alperovitch, vice president of threat research for McAfee, said it appeared humans may have been at fault again in the recent [glitch](#). Alperovitch, said a change appeared to have been made that affected the border gateway protocol, software that determines how a host, like Google, connects to other systems like AT&T or Level 3. The change "caused a fault that made them disappear from a certain part of the Internet," Alperovitch said.

Four years ago, an error related to the domain name system, which is one level above the border gateway protocol, knocked multiple Google services off the Web for several hours. Among the services affected May 7, 2005, were the Google.com home page, Gmail, Google News, Froogle, Google Images, Google Groups and [Google](#) Local.

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