

UK banking software glitch delays payments, bills

June 26 2012, by CASSANDRA VINOGRAD

(AP) — A British banking group says it has almost fully cleared up a weeklong banking glitch which delayed posting credits and debits to millions of customers with its NatWest and Royal Bank of Scotland accounts.

RBS Group said Tuesday it had successfully updated all but 1 percent of NatWest and RBS account balances overnight. The company also announced it was scrapping plans to entertain clients at the Wimbledon tennis tournament, saying it would be "inappropriate" while the problems, caused by a failed software upgrade, were unresolved.

But that has not stopped a flood of criticism over the online banking mess. Here are some of the problems the glitch has caused:

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Much of the initial outrage over the banking failure was directed at the (at)NatWest Twitter account. Problem is, the owner of the account was not a bank but a 22-year-old teacher, according to British media.

Twitter users bombarded Natalie Westerman with angry and abusive messages. In turn, Westerman — whose Twitter bio read "I'm a 22 year old woman and I'm not a bank" — redirected people to the bank's official account, (at)NatWest_Help.

Her account has since been taken down.

BAIL ISSUES

The glitch has caused problems for two defendants seeking bail, according to Britain's Courts and Tribunals service. It said that one defendant in a court case had to spend the weekend in prison because the banking issues prevented his bail money from being transferred on time and that court staff "used their discretion" to ensure that the defendant was released as soon as possible on Monday morning.

In another case, a judge made a judicial decision to release a defendant on Friday "given the circumstances" relating to the banking issue, HMS Courts and Tribunals said.

TRANSPORT TROUBLES

Arron Maddix said he was forced to cancel a job interview because he couldn't withdraw cash to pay for a train ticket or travel card with his NatWest account.

"It's caused unnecessary hassle to my day," he said in an email, describing how attempts to use an ATM, ask for cash back at a store or use his card at the train station all failed.

Maddix, 18, said fortunately he was able to reschedule the job interview for Wednesday and is hoping the problems are resolved by then.

LOST BUSINESS

Robyn Cormack said her partner lost a much-needed carpentry job after his NatWest card was declined while he tried to purchase materials.

"NatWest offered us >100 (\$156) emergency cash which isn't even enough to cover our fuel bill for the week let alone buy groceries, which

we need," Cormack said. "It's just a very hard time for everybody ... especially if you bank with NatWest!"

OVERWROUGHT and OVERDRAWN

With her bank account showing she was overdrawn, full-time mom Kelly Tomlinson said she could not go food shopping and is worried about paying her bills.

Her 2-year-old daughter's disability payments are due to come in but Tomlinson, 27, said she fears it might show up late and has already received a phone call from one company seeking payment. She said she tried to explain that the issue was due to the NatWest glitch.

"I put the money in Saturday, it was showing it was there yesterday but now it's saying I am over drawn," she said. "NatWest on the phone weren't (any) help and said I would have to go into my local branch which is in the town center and with no money I would have to walk which I can't do with a bad back."

UNCERTAIN PAYMENTS

Will Goring, 47, has been trying with no success to cancel direct debits due to go out later this week. Goring, a London-based technical director, said that if he doesn't cancel the orders mayhem will arise — bounced bills, and so on.

"You end up on hold for absolutely ages," he said of trying to handle the matter over the phone after online attempts failed. "I'm teetering on the edge of disaster because I can't cancel these things. It's a bit of a nightmare.

COMMENTER CRITICISM

Angry account holders have left their mark on the NatWest website, which features comments prominently on the homepage. One user logged in as "MetalDread" called the bank pathetic, writing "RBS (equals) Real Banking Shambles."

Another user logged in as TheKickBoxer said everyone affected should be offered compensations, writing "I went without food for 15 HOURS."

"This fundamental and preventable systems failure demonstrates that RBS is unfit to run a bank," posted another user under the name bobW from Oxford.

VENTING BY VIDEO

With most major news stories comes a YouTube send-up. In this case, Alex Bloor saw the story and decided to parody the NatWest situation to the tune of the Pet Shop Boy's "Go West."

Bloor confessed he did not expect so much interest in the video, which has already racked up more than 6,000 listens for lyrics like "Nat West I just want my dough, Nat West or to Barclays I will go."

"I have done a few other parodies before - some getting a few thousand hits, but this one seems to have struck a chord for a lot of people perhaps more than any other," he said. "This is because, I think, the issue has directly or indirectly affected virtually everyone."

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Citation: UK banking software glitch delays payments, bills (2012, June 26) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-06-uk-banking-software-glitch-payments.html>

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