

New York's tech companies makes do after Sandy

October 31 2012, by Barbara Ortutay



A man uses his mobile phone to photograph a closed and flooded subway station in lower Manhattan, in New York, Tuesday, Oct. 30, 2012. Due to superstorm Sandy, New York City awakened Tuesday to a flooded subway system, shuttered financial markets and hundreds of thousands of people without power a day after a wall of seawater and high winds slammed into the city, destroying buildings and flooding tunnels. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

(AP)—New York City's bustling technology scene, known as Silicon

Alley, was not spared by Hurricane Sandy, which knocked out power lines, devastated the public transit system and left portions of the city flooded.

On Tuesday, companies from small startups to major players such as Google and Facebook, scrambled to balance employee safety with attempts to conduct business as usual. With laptops, smartphones and a dash of the ingenuity tech companies powered through the adverse conditions— or at least tried to.

Silicon Alley is a booming part of New York City's economy. It is both a location—many technology startups are housed in the lower part of Manhattan— and a state of mind, since many companies have now sprouted across the East River in Brooklyn and elsewhere.

Companies tried not to let Sandy slow their pace. Like many New Yorkers, scads of technology workers toiled from home or hunkered down with [coworkers](#) who still had electricity. That was certainly the case among employees of trendy e-commerce site Fab.com on Tuesday. Fab's headquarters is located in the West Village, which was flooded and without power. At 6 a.m. on Tuesday, the company's 225 or so New York-based employees received an email titled "team together." The message asked whether people with electric power might open their homes to co-workers who were without power. In a few hours, 114 people responded.

By noon, there were 12 people working out of CEO Jason Goldberg's two-bedroom apartment on 42nd Street. Other workers gathered in apartments in Manhattan's midtown Hell's Kitchen neighborhood, in Brooklyn and other parts of the city. Two people, who'd flown in from Germany and India before the storm hit in some unfortunate timing also joined Goldberg after they were evacuated from their hotel rooms.

"No one wants to be sitting around doing nothing," Goldberg said in a telephone interview from his apartment, where his dog barked in the background as more employees arrived. "Everyone wants to keep things going."

Some 20 Fab.com employees planned to host co-workers in their homes overnight on Tuesday.

Google Inc. closed its sprawling New York City offices, located on 9th Avenue between 15th and 16th streets in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. The company, which is headquartered in Mountain View, California, has about 2,000 employees in its New York office. Google said the safety of its employees is its focus. The office will be closed until further notice, the company said.

The online search leader bought the 15-story, 2.9-million-square-foot building—which has more space than the Empire State Building—in 2010. In addition to housing its own offices, Google leases out much of the space, hosting many data centers. Data centers house other companies' servers, which store the vast amounts of data found on websites.

[Google](#) did not say whether the building had power as of Tuesday afternoon.

One data center flooded in Sandy's wake knocked popular New York blogs, including Gawker.com, off the Internet. The gossip and media blog, and other Gawker Media sites, responded by creating alternate websites where readers could get the latest information, whether they wanted to read about Sandy or the Octomom.

"Our New York City data center is still offline thanks to Hurricane Sandy. We are working as quickly as possible to restore the full site, but

in the interim you can view updates at updates.gawker.com," read a message on Gawker.com on Tuesday afternoon.

[Facebook](#)'s office on Madison Avenue was officially closed, with most of the 200 or so New York-based employees working from home. Though the office had power, getting to work would have been a daunting task for car-free city dwellers, and New York's subway system was still shut down.

For Quirky.com, whose users collaborate in designing household products and accessories, Superstorm Sandy left a flooded basement and the loss of power. Though they work on the seventh floor, for now, the site's 70 employees are working from home until power is restored, said Jaime Yandolino in an email.

Brooklyn-based MakerBot, a 37/8D printing company, was closed on Tuesday, but workers logged in from home. CEO Bre Pettis said the office had [power](#) and Internet access. The office will be open Wednesday.

"We were prepared for the worst and luckily came out with the best," Pettis said in a telephone interview from home, as his baby cried in the background.

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