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The Internet passes its first test as a source of communications in the aftermath of a disaster.

BYLINE: By Bob Tedeschi**BODY:**

NEARLY 40 years after it was conceived as a method of maintaining communications in the event of an attack on the United States, the Internet -- long since broadened past that purpose -- last week had the first real test of its original goal.

To judge by the availability of media sites, many of which were inaccessible in the hours just after the first plane hit the World Trade Center on Tuesday morning, one might assume the Internet had failed the test. But in fact, according to firms that analyze Web site traffic and **performance**, while some sites slowed, the overall flow of data across the Internet was not degraded by either damage to critical fiber optic lines or the clogging of those lines by Web users. Keynote Systems, which tracks the **performance** of 40 highly visited business sites, including major news and search sites, said it took about 13 seconds for the average home page to load on Tuesday morning at 10:15 Eastern time, or from three to four times the normal daily average. Over the next several hours, that average returned to normal.

The improvement reflected the sometimes drastic steps taken by media companies in particular to slash all but the most vital information from their home pages, so users could log on. Take CNN.com, which, like The New York Times on the Web and others, had been unavailable to many users immediately after the attacks. The site cut photos, graphics, text and ads from the first page users reach, leaving just one story, a few bullet points and a headline. The New York Times on the Web took a similar approach, according to Meredith Artley, associate editor. Ms. Artley said the Web page was stripped of all nonessential items, like ads and images, which made the page easier to load. She added that user registration, normally necessary to view certain articles, was suspended.

Viewed another way, CNN.com's home page before the events held more than 255 kilobytes of information; the slimmed-down version was about 20 kilobytes, according to Keynote.

CNN.com's executive producer, Mitch Gelman, said his site also tripled the number of servers -- the technology engines of the Web site -- by using servers that had been dedicated to CNNfn.com and CNNsi.com, which deliver financial and sports news, respectively. Mr. Gelman said the site also received additional servers from, among others, AOL Time Warner, which hosts CNN.com's advertising servers.

Some companies that help Web sites stay up and running reported nothing out of the ordinary on Tuesday. Melissa Neumann, a spokeswoman for Exodus Communications, which operates servers on behalf of more than 4,500 Web sites, said, "our network performed quite well." Any problems with specific sites, she said, were attributable to those sites' not having secured enough servers.

Ms. Neumann said Exodus has four facilities in New York City, including one data center in an undisclosed site in Manhattan, but that none of them was affected by the disaster.

If the overall **performance** of the Internet was not diminished on Tuesday, one reason is that commerce sites generally saw a marked decrease in the number of users. Not surprisingly, sites like Amazon, IBM.com, and eBay all had fewer visitors than their average.

But in the case of eBay, for one, the drop was slight. According to Kevin Pursglove, an eBay spokesman, people were still trading items as the day progressed, although he did not know specifics about the site's overall sales for the day.

Some of the items put up for auction included items purportedly from in or around the World Trade Center, including stop signs and other debris. EBay quickly halted trading on all items related to the World Trade Center or the Pentagon, a policy that will remain in effect until the end of the month.

While travel sites, too, saw a decrease in the number of visitors, they also experienced a more complicated day than usual. In Chicago, the headquarters of Orbitz, the online travel agency owned by several major airlines, was evacuated Tuesday morning, along with other offices in the vicinity of the Sears Tower.

Employees gathered in nearby apartments and other locations and communicated via instant messaging and conference calls, said Carol Jouzaitis, an Orbitz spokeswoman, to plan the site's response to customer travel inquiries. The company's customer service centers outside Chicago operated smoothly, she added -- a situation that was perhaps aided by the fact that many people could not complete telephone calls on land lines because of volume.

Notably, the site did book flights. "It was significantly less than on a normal day, but it wasn't negligible, either," Ms. Jouzaitis said.

Meanwhile, a supporting player in Internet commerce, advertising, was all but invisible throughout the middle part of the week, as many informational and transactional Web sites distanced themselves from product pitching.

Terrell B. Jones, the chief executive of Travelocity, said he pulled ads on his site on Tuesday "simply because it was inappropriate," and also canceled Travelocity television and radio advertisements that were scheduled for the week.

Other commerce sites placed much more emphasis on Tuesday's events than they did on their merchandise. Amazon, for example, removed all the merchandise from its front page on Tuesday evening and replaced it with a solicitation for donations to the American Red Cross. The site had raised \$5.7 million as of Saturday night.

Patty Smith, an Amazon spokeswoman, said she was unsure how long the notice would remain on the front page. "We're more focused on the news" than sales, she said. "And people can still find the stores we have." (Similar efforts were underway on the sites of the Target Corporation, Yahoo and Eddie Bauer, among others.)

Just as the travel industry was disproportionately affected by Tuesday's events, so, too, was the financial industry. According to John Metaxas, a spokesman for E*Trade, the company stopped taking orders for trades on Tuesday, and spent the day testing the systems of trading partners to ensure things would go smoothly once the markets reopened. By Tuesday night, the company began taking orders again for future trades.

For Web sites catering to the corporate community, Tuesday was largely a day off. There were some exceptions, of course. According to David Leip, corporate Webmaster for IBM.com, most of Tuesday was spent accounting for employees in the core of his technology team, which is based on Broad Street, a short walk from the World Trade Center. Mr. Leip said the staff was indeed safe.

I.B.M. technologists were, meanwhile, hard at work, helping a number of large corporate customers in the area get their sites operating normally. A company spokesman declined to name the customers, but Mr. Leip said there were "quite a number of tenants in the World Trade Center who are customers of ours, and there were some major networking hubs" in 7 World Trade Center, which collapsed Tuesday night.

The number of visitors to the IBM.com site was, of course, down significantly, Mr. Leip said. "The last thing people were worried about was doing that I.T. upgrade next quarter."

Still, not all business-to-business Internet companies were able to focus squarely on the day's events. Boston-based Akamai Technologies, which works with corporate and consumer Web sites to route information and graphics more efficiently around the globe, helped a number of media companies, including CNN.com, improve their accessibility as the day wore on.

For Akamai, the additional work was particularly troubling for other reasons. Daniel C. Lewin, the company's co-founder and chief technology officer, was on American Airlines Flight 11, the first plane to hit the World Trade Center. Felicia Spagnoli, an Akamai spokeswoman, said the company was "devastated," but she said Mr. Lewin's death did not paralyze the company's technology team.

"If anything, it inspired people that much more to get it done, and fulfill his vision to support the Internet and allow it to become a vital communications resource," Ms. Spagnoli said. "This week is a testament to the fact that his idea works, and will continue to do so."

<http://www.nytimes.com>

GRAPHIC: Chart: "Clicking During the Crisis"

Nonmedia sites with the greatest increase in traffic last Tuesday, compared with the previous Tuesday.

SITE: panyunj.gov
CHANGE: +7,715

SITE: disasterrelief.org
CHANGE: +2,342

SITE: redcross.org
CHANGE: +1,494

SITE: fbi.gov
CHANGE: +1,306

SITE: nyc.gov
CHANGE: +787

SITE: whitehouse.gov
CHANGE: +433

SITE: united.com
CHANGE: +233

SITE: amtrak.com
CHANGE: +176

SITE: fema.gov
CHANGE: +173

SITE: cia.gov
CHANGE: +129

Graph shows visitors in thousands on Sept. 4 and Sept. 11
(Source: Comscore Networks)

LOAD-DATE: September 17, 2001

[◀previous](#) Document 25 of 172. [next▶](#)

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