

## The Day the Internet Grew Up

Maurene Caplan Grey, Robert Batchelder, Joyce W. Graff

During the 11 September 2001 major terrorist attack on the United States, the Internet demonstrated that it is capable of fulfilling its function as a means of communication during a crisis. It must be considered an integral component of every business communication infrastructure.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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### Event

On 11 September 2001, terrorists caused explosions at several sites in the United States, achieving the collapse of both towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, as well as damage to the Pentagon in Washington D.C.

### Analysis

During an emergency, an enterprise will employ every communication path available. Although parts of the Internet use telecommunication facilities, the manner in which messages are routed makes the Internet less dependent on a single enterprise, single service carrier or geographic location in order to function.

**Essential, not optional:** The Internet is an integral, not optional, business communications medium. The Internet survives through redundant design, as a network of networks. Enterprises must leverage Internet-based means of communications in the event of an emergency — e.g., e-mail, instant messaging and Web sites — because such facilities enable real-time or near real-time information exchange.

- At the outset of an emergency, the IS organization should quickly assess which systems and links are operational and reinforce, as required, the performance and capacity for each Internet system. Throughout the emergency, Internet systems should be continually monitored for degradation caused by service interruptions and traffic surges. For example, if bandwidth becomes constrained, take nonessential applications offline for the duration of the emergency. If communication paths become flooded, nonessential communications can be limited so that critical communications will not be compromised. Even highly secure communications needs can be met over an inherently insecure infrastructure, as long as measures are taken to protect or encrypt the content.
- Enterprises must implement a strategy for employing all communication media available to account for all group members whether or not they are onsite. Since such activities will integrate disparate message streams, administrative personnel and procedures must employ special handling procedures to eliminate gaps and redundancies that can occur when this information is aggregated.
- Enterprises should expect to provide relaying services and act as communication forwarding points for parties in need of assistance. Not only will this function need to be performed for employees and business partners, but also for legitimate interested parties such as government officials and family members.
- Many enterprises have communities of instant messaging users that often employ one or more of the most popular consumer instant messaging systems, e.g., AOL Instant Messenger, ICQ or MSN Messenger. In many situations, instant messaging has been installed by users without enterprise sanction. Nevertheless, in an emergency, instant messaging can provide an essential method for real-time Internet communications. Where users have instant messaging accounts (regardless of the system), enterprises should collect employee screen names for population into the corporate directory. Like home telephone numbers, instant messaging screen names need not be publicly viewable, but may be useful when the need for emergency communications arise.

**Bottom Line:** The Internet is the lifeline for business communications — one that may work when others do not. Enterprises must develop business and technology processes for integrating

Internet and other communications system so that lives and property can be protected in circumstances where reaction time is the ultimate luxury.

**Analytical Sources:** Maurene Grey, Joyce Graff, Intranets & Electronic Workplace, and Robert Batchelder, Internet Strategies

## REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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Corporate Headquarters  
56 Top Gallant Road  
Stamford, CT 06902-7700  
U.S.A.  
+1 203 964 0096

European Headquarters  
Tamesis  
The Glanty  
Egham  
Surrey, TW20 9AW  
UNITED KINGDOM  
+44 1784 431611

Asia/Pacific Headquarters  
Level 7, 40 Miller Street  
North Sydney  
New South Wales 2060  
AUSTRALIA  
+61 2 9459 4600

Latin America Headquarters  
Av. das Nações Unidas 12.551  
9 andar—WTC  
04578-903 São Paulo SP  
BRAZIL  
+55 11 3443 1509