

Tech Sites Pick up the News

Traditional news sites have buckled under the weight of traffic after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. So technology sites which normally stay away from breaking news are picking up the slack. By Brad King.



PERSONALIZED INTERNET RADIO stations and technology websites abandoned their normal news-delivery operations as major Internet media outlets wilted under the crush of traffic following Tuesday's attacks in New York and Washington.

Minutes after two commercial airliners smashed into the twin towers, Internet traffic spiked, causing Web-based news sites to fail during the biggest story in years. Major news outlets -- [CNN](#), [MSNBC](#) and network news sites -- slowed to a near halt almost immediately, and remained difficult to access throughout the day.

A post on the Google search engine homepage prompted users to turn on their televisions and radio to get the latest news.

However, non-traditional new sources have stepped up to provide information to people looking for the latest news on the attacks.

[Slashdot](#) -- haven for geek technology news -- abandoned its normal news posts in favor of more traditional information.

"Normally I wouldn't consider posting this on Slashdot, but I'm making an exception this time because I can't get news through any of the conventional websites, and I

assume I'm not alone," Rob Malda, Slashdot editor, posted on the site early Tuesday morning.

With a staff of four people working through a chat room, Slashdot remained online with news throughout the day, despite getting 60 page views a second -- nearly triple the site's average traffic.

That is substantially less than major news sites. The Lycos news network -- of which Wired News is a part -- receives about 115 page views per second each day.

But Slashdot has remained up and online, along with a cadre of other traditional -- and non-traditional -- news sites.

One of the most journalistically reputable outlets, Bloomberg.com, posted continuing updates alongside its financial news. But there was little real financial news on Tuesday as the stock markets were closed.

Not every information outlet has journalists at the helm. E-mail and instant messages have been the primary source of information for many.

Individual users have gotten in on the action as well. Science fiction author William Shunn's site -- which normally has his rants and writings -- offers New Yorkers who survived the terrorist attacks a place to post short notes to family and friends.

While Slashdot and Bloomberg editors relied on wire news for information, new media journalism director Paul Grabowicz said that lessons from other national tragedies should temper how much weight people give to news delivered on the fly. Initial reports from the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing claimed the attacks came from an Arab terrorist cell, prompting three individuals to be detained. Later, two Americans were convicted of the attack.

"If you have been watching this story develop, the mainstream media has been floating things that have been wrong, but at least they are couching them in the correct caveats such as 'reportedly' or 'early reports say,'" said Grabowicz, the new media director at the University of California at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism. "If you are going online, the local news sites are really the best place to go, because you have journalists sifting through the national news feeds.

"This is the time for everyone to take a deep breath and not react to every item that they see."

Grabowicz said that if national news sites were done, people should consider going to their local newspaper's websites for information since they are staffed by trained journalists.

Those looking for Internet radio streams from New York City and Washington are out of luck. Local radio stations offering audio streams have been offline for six months, because of a dispute of payments for commercial actors.

"The one thing that has disappointed me is I have not been able to get radio stations from around the country online," said Allen Weiner, vice president of analytical services at Nielsen-Net ratings. "There aren't as many radio stations online as there were last year."

Many large radio conglomerates ceased simulcasting their programming in April as part of a dispute with the American Federation of Television and Radio Broadcasters.

Radio stations and actors have been haggling over compensation for work that is re-broadcast on the Internet.

Internet-only broadcasters are scrambling to gather feeds from their network of listeners in hopes of creating on-site streaming radio programs. The problem for these sites, as Grabowicz pointed out, is that they would most likely be manned by individuals with little or no journalism training.

"Getting individuals in New York City broadcasting is something that we are working on right now," said Alan Wallace, marketing director at Live365.com, an Internet radio company that allows users to broadcast their own shows. "We can't use our cell phones and the land lines aren't working, so it's difficult to coordinate this."

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