Beat: Technology

UPDATE 2 -- Gmail outage briefly affects millions of users worldwide

-, 30.11.-0001, 00:00 Time

USPA News - A large number of users of the popular webmail service Gmail were unable to access their accounts on Friday, Google acknowledged, but the issues were resolved in about an hour. Social networking website Google+ was also affected.

The problems began at around 2 p.m. EST (11 a.m. PST) when Gmail users started seeing a "temporary error" message. "We`re sorry, but your Gmail account is temporarily unavailable," the error message said. "We apologize for the inconvenience and suggest trying again in a few minutes." About 15 minutes later, Google confirmed on its Apps Status Dashboard that it was investigating "reports of an issue with Gmail," but provided no details about the cause of the problem. It later acknowledged that nearly all Google services had been experiencing problems, in particular Google+ and Blogger. Approximately an hour after the outage began, the vast majority of Gmail users were able to access their accounts again, although some users experienced problems until about 3:15 p.m. EST (12:15 p.m. PST). A Google spokesperson declined to say how many users were affected by the outage, although users from all parts of the world were reporting problems. "We apologize for the inconvenience and thank you for your patience and continued support. Please rest assured that system reliability is a top priority at Google, and we are making continuous improvements to make our systems better," Google said in its final update, which is expected to be followed by a detailed incident report next week. Friday`s outage began just as members of Google`s Site Reliability Engineering (SRE) team were participating in an "Ask us Anything" event on Reddit.com. The team members provided no details about the latest outage, but discussed how Google generally responds to technical problems with its services. "When an issue may be occurring, an automatic alert system will ring someone`s pager - hopefully not mine!," said Carla G., a Google Site Reliability engineer who works on Storage infrastructure. "Nearly all of our problems are caused by changes to our systems - either human or automated - so the first step is playing the `what is different game`." Another team member, Dave O`Connor, who manages the Storage Site Reliability Engineering team in Dublin, was asked "how much freaking out" is done when a Google service goes down. "Very little freaking out actually," he said, "we have a well-oiled process for this that all services use." O`Connor added: "We use thoroughly documented incident management procedures, so people understand their role explicitly and can act very quickly. We also exercise [these] processes regularly as part of our DiRT testing. Running regular service-specific drills is also a big part of making sure that once something goes wrong, we`re straight on it." Google`s most serious recent outage occurred in December 2012 when Gmail went down for approximately 18 minutes, affecting up to 170 million users at the height of the outage. A smaller percentage of users also experienced difficulty using other Google services during the outage, that was caused by an issue with load balancing software. Gmail has approximately 425 million active users worldwide, according to the most recent figure provided in June 2012.

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