New American

Written by **Steven J. DuBord** on August 6, 2009

Cyberattack Takes Down Twitter

A denial-of-service attack took down the Twitter short messaging service on the morning of August 6. As of this writing, the Twitter status blog says that "the site is back up, but we are continuing to defend against and recover from this attack."

Wired noted on August 6 that this is "the first major outage the service has suffered in months and possibly the first ever due to sabotage. The outage appeared to begin mid-morning, EST, and affected users around the world." *Wired* also mentioned that "a spokeswoman for Spark Capital, a major investor in Twitter, wouldn't offer an official statement but implied that the company isn't overly concerned about the outage and expects the site to come back online soon." Twitter co-founder Biz Stone posted a blog entry about the situation:

> On this otherwise happy Thursday morning, Twitter is the target of a denial of service attack. Attacks such as this are malicious efforts orchestrated to disrupt and make unavailable services such as online banks, credit card payment gateways, and in this case, Twitter for intended customers or users. We are defending against this attack now and will continue to update our status blog as we continue to defend and later investigate.

While the temporary loss of Twitter may be a minor inconvenience to some, *Wired* pointed out that "the resiliency of the service as it begins to fashion a business plan and cater to enterprise customers would also be a concern." After all, Twitter is following "in the glamorous tradition of Silicon Valley startups," meaning that it "makes no money but has big ambitions." The Twitter outage also limits the rapid spread of information in serious situations, such as when protestors in Iran used the service to spread news of government repression.

Twitter CEO and co-founder Evan Williams appeared on BBC Two's *Newsnight* with Kirsty Wark. The *Guardian* posted a transcript on August 6. During the interview, Wark asked about Twitter's delay of scheduled maintenance that would have taken the service offline right when Iranian protestors needed it the most. Williams said: "We had scheduled maintenance that would have been during the middle of the night, the off-peak hours for us, but it happened to be during a very key time in Iran, and we ended up putting that off a day so it was more in the middle of the night there."

Wark then asked, "Was that of your own volition, or were you asked to do that by the US government?" Williams replied:

> There were many people asked us to do that, including someone from the State Department, but that's not why we did it. We did it because we thought it was the best thing for supporting the information flow there at a crucial time, and that's kind of what we're about, supporting the open

exchange of information, so it seemed like the right thing to do.

While Twitter is back up at this point, the status blog cautions: "As we recover, users will experience some longer load times and slowness…. We're working to get back to 100% as quickly as we can." It will interesting to find out what can be determined about the source of the attack and what Twitter can do better in the future to protect itself and its users.

Photo of Twitter co-founder and CEO Evan Williams: AP Images

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