



9/11: Attack on the Wires

Statistical Spikes

Commentary

Disasters are not the only things which generate sudden spikes on the network.

Denise Streker

You might have a radio station giving away a car and you have a lot of kids and they are interested in that car, they are going to pick up the phone and try to get through and afterwards they are going to hit that redial. And they might hit the redial again and they might hit it again.

Commentary

Spikes like these are part of the daily rough and tumble of life on the network.

But the avalanche of calls on September 11th pushed the AT&T network far beyond its capacity. 430 million call completions in one day was an all time record. 100 million more than ever before. With call gapping - a disastrous blue map would begin to look like a network again, but an astronomical number of call attempts didn't stand a chance, regardless of who was making them.

Denise Straker

September 11th was one of those days we will probably never forget here in the AT&T operation center. We saw the pain and anguish others were experiencing and we really wanted to help people complete and that was on a personal level versus it being a business level.

Commentary

It was not by way of a phone call that Denise learnt that her brother who worked at the World Trade Center was likely to be OK. It was while watching one of her screens.

Denise Streker

I saw him running for his life on TV, that's how we found out.

Commentary

Late in the evening of September 11th they would finally connect by phone.

Events in September have also triggered a dramatic rethink of the role of communications in times of national crises.

Andrew Raseij is an internet entrepreneur and advisor to the U.S. Senate.

Andrew Raseij

We have this huge opportunity to take advantage of one of the core assets of the United States which is technology professionals and use them to provide support in the event of an emergency and potentially in civil defense. Basically identify those people who understand how to build websites, those people who know how to develop code for building data bases, those people who know how to plug networks and hubs and wires together to make computer networks work, to be deployed in the event of an emergency.

Commentary

Events of September 11th made unprecedented demands on all communication networks, highlighting their strengths, revealing their limitations and exposing their vulnerabilities.

Deploying the National Guard in to cyber space is a scenarios for future emergencies. In the meantime the Empire State building is once again the tallest building in New York City.