

Microsoft Windows outage causes global infrastructure shutdown

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Computer systems were shut down at major corporations, small businesses, government offices and organizations around the world on Friday when two commonly used information technology infrastructure components failed simultaneously.

Airports, banks, ground transportation, healthcare service providers, hotels, media and TV stations, retail businesses and more were brought to a halt by a digital catastrophe that began on Thursday night when Microsoft's Azure cloud platform experienced a widespread outage.

The cloud services failure was followed on Friday morning by a flawed update to a security software provided by CrowdStrike, impacting computers running the Microsoft Windows operating system. A software update that was pushed out to CrowdStrike's Falcon monitoring software sent Windows computers into a perpetual reboot cycle.

Microsoft spokesperson Frank X. Shaw confirmed that "a CrowdStrike update was responsible for bringing down a number of Windows systems globally." Shaw said the company was supporting and assisting customers to recover from the disaster.

The global shutdown is being referred to as the largest IT outage in history. Examples of the impact are:

- The FAA reported that the airlines **United, American, Delta, Spirit** and **Allegiant** had been grounded. Thousands of flights were cancelled well into the evening on Friday. The outage also cascaded instantly around the world. At Sydney Airport in **Australia**, travelers encountered delays and cancellations, as did those in **Hong Kong, India, Dubai, Berlin** and **Amsterdam**. More than 70 flights were canceled by 7:00 a.m. at **Los Angeles International Airport**. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that passengers were stuck in hours-long waits to get through security or to try to rebook their flights. At **Chicago's O'Hare Airport**, many flight information

screens, including those at boarding gates, were stuck on the blue Windows "recovery" screen as of Friday afternoon.

- Tens of thousands of desktop computers at 150 hospitals in 24 states at **CommonSpirit Health** were displaying a blue screen on Friday morning bringing the healthcare system to a halt. Daniel Barchi, CIO at CommonSpirit, told CNBC, "We were all stunned by the fact that if a computer gets this blue screen lockup, there's no way to push a software patch to fix it. You literally have to go up to it, log in as an administrator, a technology person, and then delete a line of code and make that enabled to come back online."

- **Tesla** shut down production lines at its manufacturing facilities in California and Nevada on Friday. Tesla's IT teams told employees that there was a "Windows host outage," and systems including "servers, laptops and manufacturing devices" were affected. The IT teams informed Tesla employees that they may see a "blue screen" on their various devices. Some reports said managers were telling workers to prepare for cancellation of shifts or to go home early.

- Mobile ordering at **Starbucks** was halted during the crisis. Starbucks spokesperson Jaci Anderson said in a statement emailed to NBC News that there was a temporary outage of the company's "mobile order ahead and pay features." However, on a Starbucks subreddit, where customers and employees post information and comment, store closures were reported because local managers did not want to deal with the outages.

- **US border crossings** were put into gridlock on Friday morning by the outage. People seeking to enter the US through Canada and Mexico found long delays at the crossings.

- The **San Ysidro Port of Entry** was bogged down Friday morning with pedestrians waiting three hours to cross, according to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. People

approved for the US Customs and Border Protection “Trusted Traveler” program for low-risk passengers waited up to 90 minutes. The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System posted on Twitter/X that some of its employees who live in **Tijuana, Mexico**, were unable to get to work Friday. Meanwhile, at the **US-Canada border**, Windsor police reported long delays at the crossings at the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel.

- **The Texas Department of Public Safety** closed all of its driver’s license offices at most of the state’s 254 counties across the state, and New York’s **Department of Motor Vehicles** was unable to process transactions either online or at its offices on Friday morning. In Texas, the department said in a statement that “there is no current estimate” as to when the offices will reopen. In New York, the DMV said that by Friday afternoon, some systems had been restored and that it could begin performing online transactions. News reports said at least three of its DMV offices closed for the day because of the outage, according to the agency’s website.

The serious and potentially deadly impact of the tech failure was revealed especially in the healthcare industry. Associated Press (AP) reported that the outage caused the cancellation of emergency heart surgery in Paducah, Kentucky. The AP report said, “Alison Baulos, the executive director of the Center for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago, said her 73-year-old father’s emergency open heart surgery was cancelled Friday morning due to the global tech outage, leaving her family scared and worried.”

Baulos told AP, “It’s an emergency surgery so if anything happens, it would be as a result of not having the surgery this morning. It does really make you just realize how much we rely on technology and how scary it is.” The report continued, “Her father was waiting at Baptist Hospital in Paducah, Kentucky, to find out what will happen next, she said. Her father was expecting surgery after he received a call from his doctor on Wednesday saying he had eight blockages and an aneurysm. But the family was told the operation had to be postponed due to the outage.”

The full extent and impact of the outage around the world will not be known for days or weeks. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella issued a statement on Twitter/X that said, “Yesterday, CrowdStrike released an update that began impacting IT systems globally. We are aware of this issue and are working closely with CrowdStrike and across the industry to provide customers technical

guidance and support to safely bring their systems back online.”

CrowdStrike has 29,000 customers with approximately \$4 billion in annual sales and a current stock market value of \$74 billion which is down 20 percent from a recent all-time high reached last month. It is a cloud-based cybersecurity platform with software used by industries around the world to protect against hackers and outside breaches.

The CrowdStrike Falcon antivirus software operates deep within network “endpoints,” such as desktops, servers and routers, to detect malware and other cyber threats. Due to the proliferation of hacking, ransomware and other evolving technology attacks, CrowdStrike enables its software to be configured for regular automatic updates of new antivirus responses.

It is ironic that a technology company devoted to protecting computers from being infected with viruses and malware has itself shut down a significant number of computer systems on a world scale.

A statement from CrowdStrike said the company was actively working with customers to fix the problem and that it was not a cyberattack. The statement continued, “The issue has been identified, isolated and a fix has been deployed. We are referring customers to the support portal for the latest updates and will continue to provide complete and continuous public updates on our blog.”

The prevailing commentary on the disaster is focused on the fact that there are too few providers such as Microsoft and CrowdStrike in the IT marketplace. However, the collapse of a substantial portion of the world’s information infrastructure is not caused by a lack of providers but the anarchy of the capitalist economic system in which the increasingly critical functioning of digital technologies is run on the basis of private interests and profit and not the needs of society as a whole.



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