

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

Security theater at the cost of Availability

I have a little story to tell about Google® but it likely applies to all the companies who grow massive, even with good intention at the start. It is about so-called security that ends up being an impediment to success of their customers. And it is about disrupting your customers for your own convenience.

Big enough to not care

Google is big enough to not care about their customers.

Or so they think.

Or apparently think.

That's why you cannot get support very easily and when you eventually do, it doesn't solve the problems.

It's pretty much like insurance companies

See if you recognize the pattern:

- **Make it inconvenient to and impersonal as possible to get help**
 - *Google does this with help that doesn't ever answer my questions*
 - But probably answers lot of questions others have
 - Or so everybody that get the automated help probably figures.
- **Deny all claims – blame it on the customer**
 - *This time around they claimed the problem was because I am a new customer*
 - *I have to pay then \$100 and be there for 60 days before I can do X*
 - I have had the same account doing the same thing for years.
 - *And they know it because I show it to them*
- **Give bad/wrong advice so they do the wrong thing**
 - *So let's change your DNS settings*
 - Are you sure?
 - YES
 - It will break things!!!
 - *No it won't (It did!)*
 - Oops – your whole site is down now
 - So I fix it – in a few hours things come back
 - And I am again in the broken state – back to the original problem

- **Make sure they cannot get a useful response for at least a day or a week**
 - *The reason it isn't working is because it takes up to 24 hours to work*
 - Really? An email forwarding takes 24 hours to work?
 - *Mumble mumble repeat till the customer goes away*
- **Loop as many times as you can without doing anything useful**
 - 24 hours later - still doesn't work – reply to the ticket again
 - *Try the same thing we told you to try last time as if we never talked to you*
- **If necessary create an escalation process that never gets anywhere**
 - Let me talk to a supervisor
 - *I will try to get them - Wait a while - I got one – let's connect you*
 - *Supervisor here – how can I help? - Fix it - Same advice as before*
 - It didn't work then and it won't work now - *Sure it will – Nope...*
 - Wait 24-48 hours...
- **Make sure you divide up responsibilities so nobody can get anything done**
 - After a week or so of this BS they figured it out
 - *You are a new customer: you have to wait till you paid \$100 and 60 days...*
 - I am not ... show records again – and...
 - *You have to contact the Domains team – they are the reseller*
 - They are YOU!!!
 - *Better sell that business so we don't have that claim anymore...*
- **Force the customer to coordinate between your internal teams**
 - *It's Domains → It's Workspaces → They say you are new → You are not new → ...*
 - Round and round we go – now I am CCing both on copies of everything
 - 50% of responses to my responses are automatic standard responses
 - I keep telling them this didn't work, etc. Asking for supervisors – etc.
- **When you make an error blame it on the customer**
 - *Ahah! It's because your email forwarding is turned off – do this to turn it back on*
 - I never turned it off – you must have
 - And forwarding has nothing to do with the problem I am having
 - *We don't do that*
 - Then how did it happen?

- It turns out changing something over here changes something else over there – and it doesn't tell you – it just disables something and you don't find out till it fails – in the other responsibility area
 - *And ignore the real problem of course – nice redirect attempt*
- **Forget everything that happened up till right now**
 - *So now that we fixed the problem is there anything else we can help you with?*
 - YOU HAVEN'T FIXED THE PROBLEM!!!
 - *Oh? What was the problem then?*
 - Read the 47 exchanges we had – and here are copies...
- **Loop as many times as you can**
 - *You are a new customer: you have to wait till you paid \$100 and 60 days...*
 - HERE WE GO AGAIN!
- **Eventually they will go away and the problem is then solved**
 - It's not solved yet and I have had this problem for 3+ weeks now

Too big to sue

I am litigation averse. Having been an expert witness in legal actions before, I know that the process with little against big almost always results in little being ground down while big just keeps doing it. And if little wins every once in a while, it takes a long time and has no real effect on big in any case.

So what do I do?

I try to figure out the underlying issue and inform the world about it.

So what is the underlying issue?

It all comes down to bad security.

Really? This is about bad security?

...

It is in the name of security that we see all sorts of things that interfere with functionality. In this particular case, it's asserted to be about the "security" of trusting a new customer to send emails to a mailing list before they spend \$100 and wait 2 months, but it's also about the "security" against folks trying to scam them into doing the wrong thing, which is why everything requires multi-step authentications, ultimately slowing the process down to a crawl, and it's also about "security" in the form of separation of duties so that nobody can actually get anything done, and and and and.

In the name of security

The functioning of everything from the point of view of the customer is slowed to a pace where nobody can get anything done despite lots of wasted time and effort on all sides and lots of delays along the way. But they seem to have forgotten about a few things...

Functionality

At an even deeper level, there is the fundamental, that the utility of the systems we create and operate is that they produce the value they are intended to produce. Because ultimately, the purpose of systems is the functions they perform. All of these other “security” things have to do with aspects of utility related to their ultimate functionality.

- If this seems familiar, the first sentence is a direct quote from last month’s article.
- And it’s worth repeating

Availability of services, continuity of services, the very services you make your living by providing, is the very purpose for your existence as a service provider.

**When security trumps functionality,
the reason for your existence disappears.**

Can’t someone help me?

I hate to say it, but the answer is pretty much **NO!**

I wish it wasn’t so, but few – very few – if any – wildly successful entities continue to put the individual customer first.

Despite all the claims about how we individualize everything in the modern world through the use of cyber technology, that really only applies to sales. And it has to do with stickiness.

- To work well with individuals, you need to use judgment on a personal basis.
 - When you scale you can no longer do so because there are too many of them.
- If customers had somewhere else to go and walked away, you could/would not scale.
 - The reason for massive success is popularity, usually associated with doing something useful. So as you scale, you make the utility more for less for many.
- When they get alternatives, the cost of change is higher than the pain to remain.
 - So as I explore the way to get past Google selling off their domain services, which will almost certainly make this much worse... I also have to recognize that replacing all the things I have put in place and all the trust I have placed in Google will cost a lot of time, effort, and money.

It may not get fixed – and I may not be able to email to my large lists for months. Or I might go through massive efforts and substantial costs to change providers for a while. But it will not be because of their help. It will be because I decided the tradeoff no longer benefited me.

So what happened next?

After the summary I have some of the sequence of what happened next. So to enjoy the pain of others, you can read some of the gore below.

But you probably become aware of this article as a result of an email I sent to the list. Which means it is now working. So how did that happen exactly?

When I was younger, I always found the “good ole boys network” to be offensive. Probably not because of racism or sexism – but because I was not a member of it. As it turns out...

The fix is in

Apparently I am. At least I knew who to contact if I got really desperate regarding insanity at Google. Don't tell everyone else, but the person who can get things done at Google.. is not actually at Google... It's [lauren at vortex dot com](http://lauren.at.vortex.dot.com). That's in Xerox blue¹ to try to make it harder to copy – don't tell anyone...

Lauren runs People for Internet Responsibility (PFIR), a list you should likely be on – but slightly lower priority than the Risks forum run by Peter Neuman (sorry Lauren, but truth is...) Among his other amazing feats, Lauren turns out to know people at Google and if he contacts them on your behalf, they appear to actually reply with internal competent assistance.

It only took them a day or two to grasp the situation, and another day or two to determine what was really wrong. As it turns out, they could not tell me what they actually changed to make my emails to my email list work again. Apparently there is some security reason they cannot reveal the setting which I am not allowed to see or change, that bypassed whatever control had been put in place.

Which brings us to the question of having an ombudsperson², perhaps as a legal requirement for any company large enough to need one. Because the good old boys network I talked to (Lauren – apparently gender male) worked, but of course Lauren connected me to a person at Google (apparently gender female), so it is now the good old folks network.

Help is helpful but...

So now I am in contact with someone internal at Google who apparently actually wants to help. Indeed I am still in contact, because ... email forwarding... which was not the issue I originally was contacting them about, but as it evolved...

I will not share the email describing how to do email forwarding using Google's workspace environment, because frankly it is so convoluted that I didn't have time this week to try it. I did write back explaining that to expect users to do these – perhaps 12 steps – to add forwarding to an email address – was perhaps a problem in user interface that might be addressed. After a bit of a delay, they got back an easier method, which I also haven't had a chance to test yet, but it's only 4 or 5 steps. They did suggest adding Google groups instead of email forwarding, because then I could also forward to more than one person. Of course setting up a group properly to do the same function took about 15 steps – testing – fixing – changing...

Conclusions

The reason I started using Google and AWS over running my own Internet-facing services some years ago was stated in my article of that time (Dec 27, 2010)³. And when I look back at it, the tradeoffs will likely change a bit, but I guess in the new world, we just have to live with the slow sugaring of our cyber gas tanks as security grinds away at the utility of our technology. At least until "security" in its theatrical stage, moves on to the science and engineering of (non-zero) trust and better decision-making frameworks and implementations.

1 Xerox blue was a color that Xerox machines could/would not copy (well). And of course this is not Xerox blue because I don't have the exact color values for it at hand and decided not to look it up.

2 Per Oxford languages dictionary: an official appointed to investigate individuals' complaints against maladministration, especially that of public authorities. I looked up ombudsman and then ombudswoman, leading me to look up ombudsperson – which is "a person acting as an ombudsman".

3 <http://all.net/Analyst/2011-00.pdf>

Here's what happened next

After wrongly closing one of my now multiple tickets,

Hello Fred,

Thank you for contacting Google Workspace Support.

Our team is trying to resolve the issue for the domain all.net in the case 46080624. You can follow up on that case.

Hence I will go ahead and close the case temporarily. However, should you need any further assistance after this case closes, you do have 30 days to reopen it by simply replying to any email you've received which references your unique Case Number, found in the subject line, and I will be delighted to be of assistance to you.

If you still have any issue or have queries in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact Google Workspace support .We are happy to help you.

Have a great day!

They asked for my feedback:

You still haven't resolved the issue after several weeks and are still not correcting the various things that are still wrong and likely to continue to cause harm to me and my company. You repeatedly sent me the same questions after having failed to resolve the issues, repeatedly made the same false assertions, gave me various bad and disruptive advice that actually brought my domain down until I fixed it, cause my email forwarding to stop until another team told me I should fix it, and failed to read the history before continuing to deliver the same bad advice again and again. Your lack of human support and response is stunningly bad, and augmented with your wrong error messages, overly complex process, and failure to be able to examine your own records indicates to me that you need serious help from someone on the outside to fix your ridiculous processes and address the real needs of your customers. At this point you have closed the case without resolving it, again a bad and improper response.

At this point the issues are still not resolved – but they are “working on it”.

Then this came back:

Hello ,

Thanks for your response.

As payment of your domain has been made for reseller. We can not know when you have paid the 100 \$ for this domain. We would like to confirm when you paid the 100\$, for further check on the issue.

Awaiting your reply.

Sincerely,

Bhagyashree

Google Workspace Support

Follow @AskWorkspace for regular helpful tips & product updates

So I provided – yet again – a sample receipt, screenshots of transactions with them for years, and this time I added a CSV file from American Express containing a list of transactions adding up to thousands of dollars with a few choice comments:

How do you propose I prove it?

I have provided a copy of billing from this month - you have records of my postings to this forum for years.

You - Google - is the reseller.

You claim to not have records of your own sales.

This started only a few weeks ago.

I went through this live with your folks several times and showed it to them.

I sent a screen shot at your request.

I showed it live on my screen several times.

Here are some more screen shots:

Do you want me to attach the 82 emails?

I keep asking you what you want and you keep telling me something different.

I want to talk to a supervisor who can solve this problem once and for all and stop this nonsense.

...

Here's another view of it... records from AmEx of my purchases.

You have millions of customers - do you treat them all this badly?

The actual number is more than \$4,000 just for domains and their other “Gsuite” services.

This is not the first time I have provided this information to them, of course, and another week has passed. And then... after having done this previously on more than one occasion:

Hello ,

I'd like to notify you that in order to resolve your issue as efficiently as possible, I will be directing your ticket to a specialist.

You may be asked to provide additional information to aid in troubleshooting your issue.

Your account's status and performance are a priority to us. We appreciate your collaboration, patience and understanding through this matter and we'll be in touch with you shortly. This case will remain open in the meantime.

Sincerely,

Google Workspace Support

Now comes the real BS

Hello ,

Thank you for contacting Google Workspace Support. I am Ashutosh and I am working with you through this issue. I hope this message finds you well and that you are having a great day.

I investigated through your case and I would like to tell you that if the payment has been done then please contact your reseller and ask to create the case from the resellers domain so that we can validate it .

If you need any further assistance or do you have any other queries please feel free to reply back to this email I will be more than happy to assist you. Have a great day!

Best Regards,

Ashutosh

Google Workspace Support

To this I responded:

Google is the reseller, I have contacted Google Domains and they indicated this was up to Google Workspace. I have provided lots of proof of payment and you should have your own proof of payment regardless. I have even tried to get the two of you together on this but you have each refused to communicate with the other. Fix it.

To which they responded:

Hello ,

Hope you are doing good. Thank you for your response.

Upon checking internally i came to know that the payment has been made by the reseller so please contact your reseller support in order to resolve the issue. As the payment is made by the reseller we will not be able to check the details from our end as we don't have enough access to it. So please get in touch with your billing reseller.

Have a great day!

Sincerely,

Koduru

Google Workspace Support

At this point...

The reseller - Google Domains - acknowledges that I have paid these fees and tells me it is up to YOU to fix this.

YOU NEED TO COORDINATE WITH THEM - They claim it was never wrong - and you claim they have to fix it.

CONTACT THEM - THEY ARE PART OF YOU – GOOGLE!!!