

Global IT outage throws travel, payments and health into chaos

◆ Microsoft users paralysed ◆ CrowdStrike security update blamed ◆ Fix likely to take days

FT REPORTERS

One of the biggest-ever IT outages has disrupted companies across the world, from airlines to financial services and media groups, after what should have been a routine software update cascaded into a global crisis.

Thousands of flights were cancelled yesterday, workers in cities from Tokyo to London were unable to log on to their computers, hospital operations were postponed and some television channels went off air.

The outage has been blamed on a security update from US group CrowdStrike, which caused a problem with Microsoft's Windows. PCs and servers were affected, suggesting that millions of computers may need to be fixed for the issue to be resolved.

More than 12 hours after the problems began, services including airlines and media groups had begun to come back online. But the unprecedented scale of the fault means it could take days for every Windows user to recover.

"I don't think it's too early to call it: this will be the largest IT outage in history," said Troy Hunt, a prominent security consultant, in a social media post. "This is basically what we were all worried about with Y2K, except it's actually happened this time."

Tesla's chief executive Elon Musk wrote on social media, "Biggest IT fail ever", followed by "Microsoft" next to an angry emoji face.

In China, some workers welcomed an early start to the weekend after their



Travellers at London Stansted airport on what was to be the busiest day since 2019 — Joe Giddens/PA Wire

employers told them to go home.

"Thank you Microsoft for an early vacation" trended on microblogging site Weibo, with users posting pictures of blue error screens. Australian businesses were the first to warn of problems, with the operations of retailers including Woolworths and 7-Eleven hit. Sydney airport said "a global technical outage" had affected its operations.

In Europe, airlines and airports warned of disruption on what was set to be the busiest day for departures from the UK since October 2019.

The US Federal Aviation Administration said Delta, United and American airlines grounded flights due to take off. The three largest carriers later resumed flying but almost 8,000 flights in the US were delayed or cancelled, according to aviation data provider FlightAware.

"This is a very, very uncomfortable illustration of the fragility of the world's core internet infrastructure," said Ciaran Martin, professor at Oxford university's Blavatnik School of Government and former head of the National Cyber Security Centre.

CrowdStrike chief George Kurtz said: "This is not a security incident or cyber attack. The issue has been identified, isolated and a fix has been deployed."

Microsoft said: "A CrowdStrike update was responsible for bringing down a number of IT systems globally. We are actively supporting customers to assist in their recovery."

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