

Jackson memorial gives web boost

By Maggie Shiels

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Michael Jackson's memorial service is being seen as helping to solidify a new era for the internet.

Analysts and industry watchers said the power of the web was displayed in its ability to let people interact, share and also produce content on the day.

Global web traffic was as high as 33% above normal during the event at the Staples Centre in Los Angeles.

"The web lets us connect and see the story from multiple views unlike TV," said Mashable's Ben Parr.

"This is more than a turning point. It's about giving users more than one view as well as opportunities to not only be a consumer but a producer.

"I have seen people with their iPhone 3GS's recording video from inside the Staples Center and sharing it with the world," said Mr Parr who is an associate editor with Mashable, the world's largest blog focusing on social media.

Mr Parr said he believed this service would turn out to be one of the biggest events on the web.

Akamai, which delivers more than 20% of the world's internet traffic, said it was the second-largest day on its network. The company reported nearly four million visitors per minute as of 10am pacific time, around the time the ceremony started at the Staples Centre.

The biggest day was on 25 June when news of Michael Jackson's death first hit the web. Over 4.2 million global visitors per minute visited news sites that day.

"Mass experience"

At Facebook, the world's biggest social networking site, a total of about one million users posted around 800,000 status updates related to online broadcasts hosted by CNN, E! Online, ABC and MTV.

The company said that even though there were 1.8 million updates with the word "Obama" during the president's inauguration, that event was known about and planned for months in advance.

"The site has become a central place to view the news about Michael Jackson and share in a tribute to his life and the mourning of his death," said Facebook's Elizabeth Linder.

Ustream said the memorial was the "largest ever" event hosted by the site. It served 4.6 million video streams from around the world in partnership with CBS. Viewers taking part in the chat rooms left over 12,000 messages per minute.

On the BBC traffic also increased but not to a record setting amount.

The Corporation's Gareth Owen said "while more users than normal tuned into the BBC's live coverage on the web, it was about a third of the traffic that tuned in the day after Michael Jackson died."

Yahoo said the ceremony was the single most streamed in its history with 5 million total streams.

"I thought the first screen became the second screen and the web won out over TV," said Mark Ghuneim, founder of Trendrr which tracks and reports on social and digital media.

"The immediacy of the live web and its ability to let people collaborate and share was better than watching it on the tube. The TV showed itself as a much more isolated experience.

"Michael Jackson had the effect of bringing people together and it was another of those mass experiences that acted in the same way as the presidential inauguration but in order of magnitude world-wide. This was a great day for the real live web," said Mr Ghuneim.

But not everyone agrees that it was a slam dunk for the internet.

"The web gets bragging rights for having broken the story of Michael Jackson's death on the TMZ entertainment site," said Professor Robert Thompson, the director of the Center for Popular Television at Syracuse University.

"I don't know of any internet or website that was actually there with their cameras covering the Staples event. You might have watched on the web but the pictures were still coming through the traditional pipes provided by television."

Performance

Throughout the star studded ceremony, a host of firms kept track of how well the web performed in the spotlight and under pressure from the tens of millions of people tuning in to watch online.

"In general the internet held up very nicely," said Imad Mouline the chief technology officer for Gomez Inc, a website performance measuring company.

"There were no major issues and fortunately we did not see any huge impact across the board as far as the internet was concerned. There was some slowing and rebuffering of internet feeds and some news sites took longer to load their homes pages," Mr Mouline told the BBC.

While the company would not name the seven news sites it monitored, it said that the time it took for a site to load its home page had slowed. Response times ranged from 6.5 seconds to 18.5 seconds compared to a normal span of 3.5 seconds to 7.3 seconds.

Keynote System said it also saw some slowing down but that overall the internet performed well.

On the day that Michael Jackson died the web was overwhelmed as fans and well-wishers rushed for information and confirmation of his passing.

At one point Google News thought it was under attack and put out an error messaging that warned users "your query looks similar to automated requests from a computer virus or spyware application".

"Over-covered"

Not everyone has been impressed by the floods of attention and headlines devoted to the Michael Jackson story.

A Pew Research Center Poll published last week found that 64% of those surveyed said Jackson's death has received too much coverage.

"I would say this have been over-covered," agreed Professor Thompson from Syracuse University.

"It was an important story but it was a cultural story. Michael Jackson was a force and influence in the late 20th century.

"I don't think there would be that many people, including myself, who would say this deserved to be covered in a way that knocked every other story off the screen here in the United States," Professor Thompson told BBC News.

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