

Incident Communication Templates

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Incidents don't wait for you to be ready

Incidents have always been a fact of life for IT and Operations teams. Today, many additional departments are involved whenever an incident arises.

Incident communication is the process of alerting users that a service is experiencing some type of outage or degraded performance. This is especially important for web and software services, where 24/7 availability is expected and, often, required via a service level agreement.

Simply sending a bulk email to your userbase is rarely the correct solution during an incident. There are different audiences to consider, deciding how to provide information without alarming users, and a thoughtful philosophy around continuous incident updates.

Mid-incident writer's block and indecision are a common problem when your service is down, which makes preemptively deciding your incident communication approach all the more important. In this resource, we've provided templates that will help guide your communication strategy through every stage of an incident.



Guiding Principles & Values

It's important to keep your customers in mind when communicating about an incident. Doing so can be difficult while the stress of an incident is weighing on you, so we recommend coming up with a list of incident management principles and values to guide you. You probably use values in some form to make decisions already – either your own personal values that guide your life or company values that influence business decisions. If you're lucky, those all align!

Atlassian decided that our company values were so valuable to our organization, we might as well make some specific to incident response to help those in the incident trenches during tough situations.



Detect

We know there is a problem before our customers do.



Respond

Escalate, escalate, escalate (and communicate with customers).



Recover

\$#!% happens, clean it up quickly.



Learn

Always blameless.



Improve

Never have the same incident twice.



Stages of Incident Communication

The lifecycle of an incident will likely include several points of contact. Done well, there's a familiar three-act structure to an incident: First contact, updates during the incident, then a resolution and post-mortem.

Your goal should be to quickly acknowledge the issue, briefly summarize the known impact, promise further updates, and, if you're able, alleviate any concerns about security or data loss. Keep your users updated as the incident progresses, and communicate clearly when the incident is over.

Incident Stages

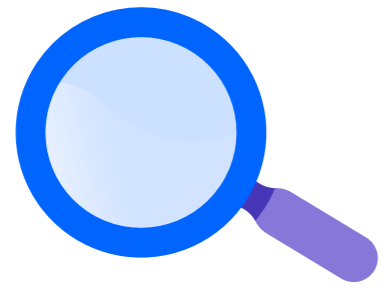
Stage	What to convey
Investigating	At this stage something is wrong, but it's not clear what exactly what the problem is or how to solve it. Still, it's important to communicate early, so keep it simple. Let customers know you're aware of the problem and working on it. No need to be more specific than that!
Identified	By now you've identified the issue and either know how to resolve it or are working towards a solution. Keep your users in the loop with updates as they come in and clearly convey the next steps you'll be taking.
Monitoring	After discovering the problem and working towards a solution, you've now implemented what you believe is the fix. Let customers know that you are monitoring the fix and ensuring it works before announcing a resolution.
Resolved	You've done it! The incident is resolved and your service is fully restored. Now you should close the loop with everyone who was informed about the incident and breathe a sigh of relief until the next one.



'Investigating' Templates

One of the most important steps of incident communication is also the first one – the acknowledgment of an issue. Letting people know that you're aware something is wrong and looking into it can proactively eliminate redundant support tickets, improve trust, and reduce overall confusion. Below are templates for when you need to quickly tell your customers something is wrong. Show them you're investigating!

Scenario	Example Text
Service Disruption	<p><u>Title:</u> [COMPANY NAME] Service Disruption</p> <p>We are currently experiencing a service disruption. Our [ADD TEAM] team is working to identify the root cause and implement a solution.</p> <p>[ADD GENERAL IMPACT] users may be affected.</p> <p>We will send an additional update in [NEXT UPDATE TIME] minutes.</p>
Can't Log In	<p><u>Title:</u> Trouble logging in</p> <p>Some users may be experiencing trouble when logging in to [SERVICE NAME]. Our [ADD TEAM] team is currently investigating issues related to [ADD SUSPECTED ROOT CAUSE].</p> <p>We will send an additional update in [NEXT UPDATE] minutes.</p>
Issue with upstream provider	<p><u>Title:</u> Issue with our upstream provider</p> <p>Our upstream provider, [ADD THIRD PARTY VENDOR], is currently experiencing an issue which is affecting our ability to [THIRD PARTY SERVICE]. See [THIRD PARTY SERVICE STATUS PAGE] for more details.</p> <p>We will resolve this incident once we have received confirmation the issue has been resolved from our upstream provider.</p>



'Investigating' Templates (Cont'd)

Scenario	Example Text
Connectivity issues	<p><u>Title:</u> <i>Connectivity issues</i></p> <p><i>A small percentage of incoming traffic is experiencing intermittent connectivity issues with our system. We are looking into the issue.</i></p>
Issue with our DNS provider	<p><u>Title:</u> <i>Issues with our DNS provider</i></p> <p><i>Our DNS provider is currently experiencing an issue which is causing [ADD CUSTOMER IMPACT]. We will update here as soon as we receive additional information from our provider.</i></p>
Delay in delivering messages	<p><u>Title:</u> <i>Delay in delivering messages</i></p> <p><i>We have identified delays in message delivery, and are actively investigating. Messages are currently [QUEUED OR DROPPED] and will [STATE OF MESSAGES WHEN FIXED] once we resolve the issue.</i></p> <p><i>We will send an additional update in [NEXT UPDATE] minutes.</i></p>
Issue with our support site	<p><u>Title:</u> <i>Support portal unavailable</i></p> <p><i>Our support portal may not be accessible for some users. We are currently investigating the issue. In the meantime if something is urgent, contact us through [SECONDARY SUPPORT EMAIL] or on twitter [ADD TWITTER HANDLE].</i></p> <p><i>We will send an additional update in [NEXT UPDATE] minutes.</i></p>



Incident Updates

After you've initially alerted your customers about an incident, you'll need to keep them informed with updates. Especially for long-running incidents, regular and consistent updates will help avoid confusion about the current status of your application. Even an update saying "We're still working on the problem, nothing new to report." is better than silence. People left in the dark start to expect the worst.

Your company's updates can be more direct and brief than than the original 'Investigating' declaration. Focus on writing updates that both ease customer concerns and improve trust in your efforts.

The following is an helpful example of the entire incident lifecycle from Mixpanel, a Statuspage customer.

Degraded API Performance Impacting Reports for a Subset of Projects

INCIDENT REPORT FOR MIXPANEL

RESOLVED	This incident has been resolved. Posted 20 days ago. Feb 28, 2020 - 12:12 PST
MONITORING	A fix has been implemented and we are monitoring the results. Posted 20 days ago. Feb 28, 2020 - 08:57 PST
INVESTIGATING	The fix deployed did not solve the issue for some of the projects. Our engineers are currently working on this. Thanks for your patience. Posted 20 days ago. Feb 28, 2020 - 07:35 PST
MONITORING	A fix has been implemented and we are monitoring the results. Posted 20 days ago. Feb 28, 2020 - 07:26 PST
INVESTIGATING	A subset of projects are experiencing issues loading reports and exporting data through the API endpoint mixpanel.com/api/2.0/ . Our engineers are working to fix this issue as quickly as possible. We truly appreciate your patience and apologize for the inconvenience. If you have any questions, please contact support Posted 20 days ago. Feb 28, 2020 - 07:12 PST

This incident affected: Query API.

[← Current Status](#)Powered by Statuspage

Conclusion

During the heat of a service outage, quickly writing an update for customers can be stressful. The templates we created are generic and flexible enough to work for many types of service interruptions. They have clearly-marked places to fill in more details during a real incident so you can focus on the resolution. And you can always add or remove details as they become available.

Every incident is unique, and you'll likely never find a perfect message that works for every outage. But having a template gives you a great starting point in the heat of an incident and helps avoid writer's block during critical situations.



🔍 Want to dig deeper?

atlassian.com/statuspage

🚩 Have questions?

Contact us at sales@atlassian.com