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## Hurricane Irene creates whirlwind of mobile traffic

By [Giselle Tsurulnik](#)

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**Consumers turned to apps and the mobile Web to stay up to date**

Irene created a storm of mobile Web and app traffic as consumers experiencing the natural disaster flooded the mobile Web and used mobile search for news and information regarding the hurricane.

Gumiyo Mobile claims its newspaper customers on the East Coast saw up to a 300 percent or more increase in mobile traffic to their respective news Web sites over the weekend of Aug. 27 as a result of Hurricane Irene. Additionally, Chomp found that mobile users turned to apps in significantly larger numbers during the period of time around natural disasters. Search traffic for hurricane apps spiked more than 2,000 percent above trend during Hurricane Irene's formation, warning and landfall.

"I think it's human nature that caused the spikes in traffic to mobile sites during the hurricane," said Richard Abronson, vice president of media and agency services at Gumiyo Inc., Woodland Hills, CA. "Anyone who experiences a natural disaster understands the urgent need for news and information that could affect our lives.

"When the power goes out, as it often does during disasters, we feel cutoff and that increases our anxiety in an already anxious situation," he said. "Before we had Internet-connected mobile devices, a power outage that killed access to television and the Internet meant we'd be glued to a battery-operated radio.

"Our smartphones arguably offer much more complete news coverage than the radio, and they do so in interactive, multimedia environment. As a result, we are glued to mobile devices instead."

### Irene's course

[Gumiyo's](#) data shows particularly marked spikes in both page views and unique visitors on Sunday, Aug. 28 when the effects of the crisis were most pronounced.

Earlier in the month, [Chomp](#) saw a 250 percent spike during the formation of Tropical Storm Emily. Search traffic for earthquake apps was up 2,000 percent immediately after the 5.8 magnitude event in Virginia.

The spike in mobile traffic during Hurricane Irene is a testament to how important it is for consumers to have ready access to critical news, community information, and government and weather advisories.

What's more, consumers can access critical news from multiple sources thereby ensuring the reliability of the information so that they can make the best decisions.

The biggest challenge is for the carriers, and it was disconcerting to many people that mobile service failed during the earthquake on the East Coast.

"Mobile is a great way to keep people up to date during a disaster for the reasons I mentioned previously, but it's also got a lot to do with the fact that people always have their phones with them," Mr. Abronson said.

"Always on, always present, or some variant of that catchphrase, has been popular in our industry from a marketing perspective, but that has even greater meaning in a disaster," he said. "My mobile device can provide me the information I need even if I'm out stacking sandbags or evacuating from a brushfire.

"The radio is streaming information to me in a linear way that may or may not be immediately relevant to me, but I can call up exactly the information I need on my mobile device."

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