Lawyers vs. Reality

a manifesto for SLA language that makes sense

Joe Abley
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Myths

• “We know an outage when we see it”
  - if that was true, we wouldn’t need an SLA

• “We’re all friends here, we trust each other to do the right thing”
  - if that were true we wouldn’t need a contract

• “We have an SLA, so we are protected”
  - if you can’t agree what the SLA means when you need it, an SLA is a recipe for an argument, not better service
When Friends Fall Out

• “We see query latencies over 200ms, we declare an outage”
  • 200ms between where and where?
  • How do I reproduce that?
You will never see <200ms query latency

• on a path that includes a satellite

• on a path that includes a flat-lined 100M peering link

• on a path that is also used by a teenager who recently discovered this thing called bittorrent
  • there is never enough bandwidth for teenagers

• from a mobile device with 1 bar of GPRS service
The Problem

• On its own, “200ms” doesn’t mean anything

• Thresholds need to be tied to measurements

• Measurements need to be reproducible and precisely described

• The path to happiness is paved with reasonable expectations, not littered with bear traps of ambiguity
Hug a Lawyer Today

- The problem is not actually with lawyers
  - the title of this presentation is needlessly inflammatory
  - I am the buzzfeed of ICANN 51
- Lawyers are trained to avoid the kind of ambiguity that we are complaining about, here
  - the fact that “<200ms” means nothing on its own is just something we forgot to mention to them
The Internet is:

• a seething, chaotic mess of updates, withdrawals, queues and discards, loss and reordering

• and the Internet five seconds ago is not necessarily the Internet right now

• the largest equivalence class in the reflexive, transitive, symmetric closure of the relationship 'can be reached by an IP packet from' (Seth Breidbart)

• my Internet is not the same as your Internet
Good SLA Language:

- is tied to tests that are reproducible and precisely described
- acknowledges that the Internet is a pile of other peoples’ networks, over which you have little control
- focuses on desired user experience, not every possible event that might theoretically contribute to the decline of that experience
Nice to Have

• An understanding of what acceptable service looks like

• Use of third-party measurement systems

• Specification of measurements that are clear, and that can be performed by either party to produce equivalent results

• Written with the goal of maintaining acceptable service, not delivering a throat punch

• What else?
Homework

• Understand what acceptable service means for you

• Review your SLA language

• Imagine the conversation that would result if you ever tried to claim an SLA credit

• Hug your lawyer