

Hack attacks threaten security, future of the Internet



MIKE WENDLAND
The world has never seen a form of communication as revolutionary as the Internet. But as we've seen the past week in the massive hack attacks that brought down some of the nation's most popular Web sites, the Internet's success is far from assured.

Some 25 years ago, the media was full of gloomy accounts of another form of communication — the citizen's band radio craze. At its peak in the mid to late '70s, some 18 million Americans were "10-4ing" their "good buddies" and movies, magazines and media coverage used some of the same adjectives we see connected with the Internet to describe

what this one-on-one form of personal communication would mean to society.

Alas, the CB radio craze self-destructed because some people simply couldn't behave them-selves.

Just a few people, to be sure.

Just a few who keyed down their microphones, a shouted obscenity, whistled, cat-called and used illegal amplifiers to boost their signals so powerfully they drowned out the vast majority of law-abiding users who really were trying to communicate.

Now,

that reliability in being

severely tested.

From my calls and e-mail to

hackers and Internet security experts this week, it appears that the attack could easily be the work of a bunch of teenage nerds, dubbed "script kiddies" or

and widespread than CB radios.

And with 120 million users, the Internet is vastly more popular.

But if billion-dollar-plus Web sites can't prevent 16-year-olds from crashing down their service at will, what ultimate good will the Internet be?

It took some time to convince

people that the Internet was a

reliable means of communication and commerce. But, we were

finally assured: Security and pri-

acy issues were handled.

We could trust the Net. Rely on it.

And so e-commerce and Internet

technology took off, being largely

responsible for the incredible

economic boom we've been enjoy-

ing for two years now.

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