

Make Me Smart October 4, 2021 transcript

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Kai Ryssdal: Really, that's where you start?

Molly Wood: Yar, she blows.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah. Hey everybody, I'm Kai Ryssdal, welcome back--if there was, if there was any doubt as to which podcast you happen to have downloaded and queued up next on your player, this is, this is Make Me Smart, making the day makes sense. Long fart sounds and deep sighs.

Molly Wood: Our specialty today. I'm Molly Wood. Thanks for joining us for fart sounds and deep sighs, the greatest podcast title I think I've ever heard. It is Monday, also known as what did we miss Monday, where we do a run through of the stories you might have missed over the weekend, although honestly, it's just the stories you might have missed today because today alone has been like, like an eight g force day or what, I just made that up, eight g's, I don't know. Anyway, it's Monday. If you haven't subscribed, you should totally subscribe because why would you want to miss a second of what we're doing here right now?

Kai Ryssdal: You're supposed to sell it, not talk it down!

Molly Wood: Yeah, it's great. Double check, just double check to see if you click the little check button because they changed it. And now it's like you hit a plus or whatever to follow it instead of subscribe because that made people think that it costs money. So just in case you're not, you should. There you go.

Kai Ryssdal: Yep. All right. Let us begin with the news. And oh my goodness, Facebook. Holy cow, right?

Molly Wood: Yeah. It's funny because like, we have to mute, you know, on Mondays now our new thing is we mutually agree on one big story. And this just was not even nobody, even had to talk about it because wow. Facebook went down, Instagram went down, Whatsapp went down for almost six hours. It is impossible to overstate what a big deal that is. It's also impossible to ignore the pretty weird timing.

Kai Ryssdal: Explain that a little bit.

Molly Wood: Which is, it's coming the day after the Facebook whistleblower was on 60 minutes on Sunday night, essentially talking about how she did all of this work to gather all these documents that have been the basis of the Wall Street Journal's Facebook Files, which we have been obsessed with, along with many members of Congress and regulators. And a lot of really damning information has come out about Facebook over the past few days. And so that's what we were digesting. We were sort of sitting there like, wow, Facebook has known a lot about the potential harms that its platform causes. At many points, it seems to have just chosen, you know, engagement and making money. And everybody was debating that philosophical choice. Matt Levin from Bloomberg had a really interesting piece today about how like, that's not illegal. There might be parts of it that we want to make illegal, but it's not right now. And so what is the kind of question that we're trying to answer here? And then all of that was just blown out of the water by a six hour outage of a company that serves up to 3 billion people.

Kai Ryssdal: It's, it's amazeballs. Yeah, amazeballs.

Molly Wood: Like, that doesn't happen. That does not happen at that scale. And I, Kai wasn't there, but on your show today, I talked about how there's this massive economic effect. And I hadn't even really, really internalized how much of an effect, like there's all of the people who can't, you know, sell on marketplace, or the small businesses that only exist, there are the advertisers. But I had actually forgotten about WhatsApp, being this global power horse that's trying to turn itself into like a WeChat, where it's a centralized app for taking all these orders and calling an Uber and making payments. And all of that commerce went away for six hours, seemingly because Facebook is like, so maybe arrogant, but definitely centralized that when there was some kind of configuration error internally, that was just, there's a great summary, actually, by this guy, Alex Horton, who writes for The Guardian, who's on parental leave right now. But he was like, you know, essentially, Facebook, accidentally we assume, sent this update to a deep level routing protocol on the internet that was basically like, hey, we don't have any servers anymore. Love you, bye. And normally, that would be totally fine, but--

Kai Ryssdal: Actually, could, could you actually, for those who might not have heard Marketplace today, you gave a really good explanation of what it is understood happened and sort of the real world analogy. Would you do that again, please?

Molly Wood: Absolutely. It would be my pleasure. I was very proud of that.

Kai Ryssdal: You should be.

Molly Wood: So essentially, you've, we have addresses, right? We have locations and I said that what essentially happened with Facebook today is that it says though someone just sort of accidentally went in--we assume accidentally--went in and deleted, let's say, my home address from Google Maps. And all of these, you know, doordash delivery drivers and the post office and the Amazon guys and everybody who's trying to find my house, all of a sudden, they can't. There's no address there. They're just driving around in circles, driving by my house a million times, probably because it doesn't exist as far as their mapping service is concerned, just went

invisible. So invisible, it was so disconnected from various internet protocols, that some sites actually thought the domain Facebook.com was for sale. Yeah, because instead of using a back end registration, they were using like, DNS lookup, and they were like, oh, well, I used, you know, this internet protocol to like, ping for Facebook.com and see if it's there and nothing answered. So we put Facebook.com up for sale. Bonkers!

Kai Ryssdal: Oh, my God, right? I mean, that's crazy. It serves 3 billion people, a third of humanity, and it's gone.

Molly Wood: And it just went away.

Kai Ryssdal: So let me ask you something substantive though, in the long run--well, I know the answer to this one, so I'll frame it differently. What is a more significant news story? The whistleblower Francis Haugen from last night on 60 minutes, or today's outage and just the revelation of how deeply Facebook is intertwined in our daily lives?

Molly Wood: I mean, I think it is, I think, taken together, I'm not trying to dodge, but when you-- I made a joke earlier today that, you know, I could imagine that Mark Zuckerberg was like, oh, yeah? Try to live without me a-holes. And just like, hit the button, he just pulled the plug, he was like, okay, yeah, that's how you like me now? And the whole world was like, uh-oh. So although these revelations are a really big deal, and we may want to think about regulating this company a little more than zero, which is how much we regulate this company now, it's very likely that we can no longer live without it. And we kind of found that today, and it's a little terrifying. And by live, I mean, conduct global commerce. Also Facebook is way too centralized.

Kai Ryssdal: Oh, yeah, totally. Totally. I have one more and then, and then we got to move on cause we got it, there's a couple of other things to talk about. I would be curious as to your take on the absolute disappearance of Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg from any role defending this company publicly.

Molly Wood: Yes. That is bananas. Imagine if, you know, any other company if like, substantive proof of knowledge of harm had come out, right? It was not illegal to sell cigarettes. And then substantive proof of actual harm came out. Yeah. Or like Boeing, right? No CEO just disappears, just utterly goes silent.

Kai Ryssdal: Let alone a CEO, who's, who's got complete control over the company, right? I mean, Zuckerberg burps and Facebook jumps, right?

Molly Wood: And there's no board, you know, accountability. There's no situation in the board, in which the board is going to come along and be like, you got to go, which might happen at some other company at this point. At this point, a normal board would be looking at the CEO and everybody under him and being like, you are a risk. Except that literally yesterday, I got like a research note, you know, an analyst note from an investor firm that, an investment firm that was like, we rate Facebook goodbye. People can't get rid of it.

Kai Ryssdal: Wow. Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

Molly Wood: Yeah. So that's why I say you can't separate those stories.

Kai Ryssdal: Yep. Yep. Yeah. All right. Let's scoot through another couple here. So I think a couple of things that caught my, my eye today. Number one, New Zealand, which has been under Jacinda Ardern. Sort of the picture of here's how we're gonna deal with COVID. We're going to shut it down. We're going to control our borders, and yes, they're a small island nation, I get that, but come on, close things down, and we're gonna control it and have zero illnesses and deaths. Well, they've decided that's not gonna work anymore. They're given up and they're just going to try to live with it, which is number one, foreseeable. But number two, also kind of too bad because I was rooting for Jacinda Ardern. You know, the whole COVID zero thing in Australia is gone. I will read straight from my notes in the rundown here. I am elevating the debt limit problem to DEF CON two, people, DEF CON two. We're at DEF CON two with the debt limit. And here's why. Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader of the Senate, who, as we know, has stood fast in his belief that he gets to decide pretty much everything about what goes through the Senate of the United States where there is in the majority of the minority, wrote a letter to President Biden today in which, and this is the only way I can characterize it, in which he told off the president of the United States, wagged his finger and said, no, no, no, no, no, Joe. We've known each other for 40 years, but you're not doing your job right. And your new gang of cronies--he said lieutenants, but he meant cronies-- up here on Capitol Hill aren't governing right. And it's remarkable. It's remarkable. And so I, I cannot actually say that I think the United States is going to default on its debt. Although the president of the United States did say today he can, cannot guarantee that it won't. I think it's a much dicier proposition now and I think you have to look for a little, little agita, a little Saurus in the financial markets in the next like, 10 days. Seriously, it's a, this is way worse than 2011, or 2013. Way worse.

Molly Wood: Yeah. Terrible. This is a direct quote from that letter. Republicans position is simple. We have no list of demands. For two and a half months, we have simply warned that since your party wishes to govern alone, it must handle the debt limit alone as well. I don't even know what that means. Except, of course, it's been blocked straight up and down vote. Well also he won't let him govern alone. Mitch McConnell blocked a straight up and down vote. They were like, okay, great. If you want us to govern alone, like we'll pass it by yourselves. And he was like, oh, no, you can't have a vote without a threat of a filibuster. Yeah. DEF CON two, just remind the non military audience, out of, out of what, 5?

Kai Ryssdal: So, so def DEF CON is out of five, five is peace and everything's normal. One is nuclear war is happening right now.

Molly Wood: Oh, crap!

Kai Ryssdal: So two's bad. Two, two is bad. Yes. Two is bad. I thought about three, but I decided after this letter, it was a two.

Molly Wood: Okay, great. Put all your gold and Bitcoin, kids! No, I'm just kidding.

Kai Ryssdal: Consult your own financial advisor.

Molly Wood: Do not listen to anything I just said. Hey, speaking of bad, I know that everybody was focused on Facebook going down today. But a company that is a critical part of the global telecommunications infrastructure used by AT&T, T Mobile, Verizon, and several others around the world, such as Vodafone and China Mobile, quietly disclose that hackers were inside its system for years today, impacting more than 200 of its clients and potentially millions of cell phone users worldwide. The type of communication that this company sign averse specifically handles every year, is text messages. Think about how often you get like, two factor authentication for your bank account via text message or all of the other information that you conduct via text message. And this company apparently had hackers just roaming around for five years. Five years. This is the, this is like the level, speaking of DEF CON, this is the level of cybersecurity that we're at right now. Where, first of all, we have this unbelievable consolidation, like at a given company can work with everyone and has access and this is a direct quote from a security researcher, "to the communications of hundreds of millions if not billions of people around the world." A five year breach of women sign versus main systems a global privacy disaster. Senator Ron Wyden referred to it as basically like an espionage goldmine. Another cybersecurity expert call it today's state sponsored wet dream. Pardon me. Oh, I mean it is, you're welcome. Sorry, I mean, you know, sometimes you gotta go grown up with the seriousness of the things. And they only disclosed it as part of an SEC filing because they were going to go public through a SPAC. I mean, we are so far behind the cybersecurity eight ball here, like it's, it's, it's impossible to even quantify. We're not even in the pool hall. So that's no good. Also, soon our entertainment is gonna go away as well because apparently--

Kai Ryssdal: Yes, yes. Huge news.

Molly Wood: Also today, real quick, the International alliance of theatrical stage employees has voted to authorize a strike against Hollywood Studios. It's a pretty small union. But nevertheless, it represents 150,000 crew members of camera operators, cinematographers, editors, makeup artists, and they might go on strike primarily because like, streaming outlets don't pay.

Kai Ryssdal: It's called a yahtzee. And, and here's the amazeballs thing about it. They had a turnout of almost 90% of eligible members voting and 98.6% voted hell yes. We're going on strike. Yeah, so cue up those reruns, folks.

Molly Wood: Just pay them. I don't understand. I mean it's been going on for years, but yeah, yikes. Yikes. Happy place, real quick, real quick? Let's go. We asked you to write in with make me smile things and duh, like tons of you wrote in about fat bear week which was our favorite thing this time last year. Leah, Connor, other people. Semifinal voting is today and also happened yesterday, finals are tomorrow. And definitely don't forget to take a look at the meet the bears tab, which is the most fun part. Actually my own child sent this to me and was like,

mom, look, I voted for spring 182. Fat bear week, the best, thank you to everybody who wrote to us.

Kai Ryssdal: It's amazing.

Molly Wood: I know, they literally go from like, scrawny little--

Kai Ryssdal: They're so skinny and then they, yeah.

Molly Wood: And then they go fat. There's fat bear Jr. There's even a junior category this year. It's so cute.

Kai Ryssdal: You got all North Dakota on me there for a second.

Molly Wood: I did, actually. Oh, it's so cute. Look at these juniors. Oh my god. Oh, we're done. We're done. Kai's out tomorrow, Kimberly will be in. We will be discussing the Indian Child Welfare Act, which is fascinating. This is a federal law that basically says native kids who are up for foster care or adoption should stay within Native American communities whenever possible, and the law has been under attack. We're gonna look at the money behind that, but also what it means generally for the future of native tribes, because as with all things, this has lots of unintended consequences. It's gonna be super interesting.

Kai Ryssdal: Yeah. Send us your comments, questions, thoughts on that or anything else you hear on this particular podcast. Or anything else you hear on any podcast, really. We just want to know what's on your minds. Make me smile suggestions as well, please. Marketplace.org is the website, makemesmart@marketplace.org is the email address, which is even more convenient, or you just call. Our number is 508-827-6278, 508-UB-SMART. Charlton Thorpe, save us from ourselves.

Molly Wood: We did it.

Kai Ryssdal: Oh, my goodness.

Molly Wood: We're only one minute over.

Kai Ryssdal: That's not bad. Not bad.

Molly Wood: That's pretty good. You got a lot in there. Make Me Smart is produced and directed by Marissa Cabrera. Today's program was engineered by Charlton Thorpe, who saved us from ourselves. Tony Wagner writes our newsletters, you should get those, too.

Kai Ryssdal: Bridget Bodnar is the senior producer of this here podcast. The executive director of on demand is Sitara Nieves.

Molly Wood: 132 spring cub. That's the one, that's the one that my son voted for.

Kai Ryssdal: You can go find yourself any cub you like.

Molly Wood: They're so fat!

Kai Ryssdal: They are, it's crazy actually how big they get, but they got to do that whole hibernating thing.