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SecTor looks to build Canadian security community

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by Robert Dutt

Brian Bourne wants to build a stronger sense of community in the circle of Canadian security professionals.

Bourne, president of solution provider CMS Consulting, is passionate about security to the point where last year, he co-founded SecTor, a now-annual security conference that aims to "illuminate the black arts" of security. Bourne kicked off the second instance of the event Tuesday with a focus on building a real sense of community in the space.

"Last year, we focused on the best content in terms of speakers and sponsors and presentations," he said. "This year, we're looking to facilitate community and build interactions among attendees."

Efforts to build interaction range from a new badge that encourages users to exchange details to a mystery-cloaked contest, about which details are given away frequently. Prizes include tickets to next year's show and up to $500 in cash, and organizers are allowing groups of up to five to band together to try to win, helping to promote interaction amongst attendees.

Even new features like Lockpick Village, which aims to connect information security with physical security by showing just how easy it is to pick a lock, are designed to encourage a maximum amount of interaction amongst attendees.

That's not to say the speakers and content go away. In fact, Bourne said this year's lineup is just as good or better. It's just that now that the SecTor name is out there, it's a little easier to book high-profile speakers.

"Last year, we had to solicit speakers," he said. "This year, the content is really fresh, and we got all kinds of submissions."

In fact, Bourne said, the group behind the event, all of whom work on SecTor as an extra-curricular activity, had to said through "well over 100" speaker applications.

Last year, attendance was just over 400, and this year, the figure is "north of 500," short of the 600 or so Bourne had hoped for, but still a healthy 25 per cent increase in attendance.

"There are lots of really god security people in Canada," Bourne said. "Surprisingly so," in light of our relatively small population.

However, there's still a lot of market education to be done. In the future, the event may add tracks for more management-type staff who lack the deep expertise and backgrounds in security, but for now, there's still a need to bild into the Canadian security community what Bourne describes as "an adequate sense of paranoia."

"I don't think enough people take it seriously in Canada," he said. "We tend to think very optimistically."

Bourne joked that the organizers "prepped sponsors for the fact that this is really techie group," but the truth may not be too far from that. Bourne said an event like SecTor can be very different in terms of audience needs and expectations than trade shows with more mainstream appeal.

"They don't want a flashy brochure, they want to know that you've got real technology," he said. "And they don't want to know that it does something, they want to know how it does it."

Other new features at this year's event include a first-ever training day, which happened on Monday prior to the beginning of the main festivities and offered attendees "deep dives" on many of the security issues being discussed at the event.

Add to that two days of wall-to-wall sessions and you've got a busy schedule that had some attendees struggling to choose between ways to spend time. But Bourne says that having a wealth of choices is a positive thing for attendees.

"If everybody's most negative comment is that there's too much to do over the course of these two days, that's a great situation for us," he said.

SecTor continues Wednesday at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre after a "super-secret unofficial party" at the Bier Markt on the Esplanade Tuesday evening.

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