

Should security pros get organized?

by Andrew McKay

The SecTor security conference kicked off Tuesday in Toronto with a discussion on whether IT security professionals need to do more to legitimize their work.

Dr. Richard Reiner, chief security and technology officer at Telus Security Solutions, opened the event by raising the issue of whether the IT security field, as it's presently defined, is on solid ground.

"I think there are some real questions to be answered about this field we work in, what is working, what isn't working, and what should we change," he said.

One of the issues, Reiner said, is that while industry focus on security increases, it's scattershot.

Certifications are on the rise, but there aren't any standards applied to those certifications, outside those deemed necessary by vendors or select organizations. According to his research, the experience levels of security professionals peaked in 2004, meaning there are more certified pros, but they know less on average than their predecessors.

"There are more risks out there, and our capability of managing them in most organizations is still quite primitive," he said.

"It's very difficult to make sense of that landscape, it's difficult to tell which (certifications) are high value."

Reiner also noted the discrepancy between what's being researched, and what's actually causing issues for organizations.

"You'll be amazed between what is being researched in academia, versus what is being built in industry," he said.

"They're worlds apart and generally the research done by one is of no use whatsoever to the other."

While he didn't endorse or dismiss the idea, Reiner said one suggestion has been to professionalize the industry, similar to the legal, construction or medicine fields, where self-governing organizations enforce standards, ethics and certifications.

"The complexity of the field is such that it is very difficult for someone from the outside to judge the decisions on the inside," he said.

"I'm not saying we need to do this; but I think there are benefits to doing it, and I think we want to begin the debate ourselves. If we don't decide these things, we'll have other people doing it for us."

Still, just talking about it won't get far unless security professionals can get on the same page, he said.

"I don't know if we have a sufficient consensus on a lot of these issues to create a self-regulating industry, even if we want to."