

Priorities, resources in security vary for IT pros

by Andrew McKay

Coinciding with IT Security Week, Microsoft and the Canadian Advanced Technology Alliance have teamed on a survey that measures the roles and relevance of IT security in the corporate marketplace. Some of the findings are to be expected, while others provide an indication of where IT security may be going.

The study, which polled 332 IT people over the first two weeks of November, found that almost half of respondents see IT security experience as a contributor to future career growth. Less than twenty per cent, however, see colleagues as a primary resource for IT security knowledge; most tend to rely on their own personal security experts.

Bruce Cowper, Canadian security lead at Microsoft Canada, said the goal of the survey was to evaluate Canadians' perceptions of security in the IT framework.

"One of things we're really starting to see in Canada is people starting to take security more seriously, but also beginning to understand that if they're able to better deal with security and ask the right questions and have a holistic view, they can use that to help them achieve career growth," Cowper said.

One finding in the survey was that Canadian IT people seem confident in Canada's ability to remain at the forefront of the sector from a global perspective.

"I'm starting to see this more and more," Cowper said, "a lot of Canadians are out there on a worldwide stage and representing Canada in the realm of security."

Kevin Wennekes, vice president, research for CATA Alliance, said the study showed that while many issues remain prominent throughout the corporate environment, there are also some significant discrepancies.

"We realized there's probably a very different perspective between what happens in the boardroom and what happens in the basement, so to speak," he said.

For example, when asked about the most pressing challenge to IT security, lack of best practices was the first priority for CIOs, but IT project managers only rated it seventh. Inversely, IT project managers though lack of resources was the biggest challenge; that need only placed fourth with CIOs.

"There's an interesting gap now, because traditionally in an organization, security guys run the network," said Brian O'Higgins of ThirdBrigade.

"Now we get all these new risk-based standards that talk about applications. The application programmers have no security expertise; the security people have no application expertise. It's not a great environment for fixing security, but it's a great environment for attackers."

Mark Fabro, CEO and president of Lofty Perch, disagrees. He thinks that while those issues pop out now, they're becoming less prevalent as roles blur.

"I think the IT community in general has actually picked up on the problem," Fabro said.

"One of the reasons IT professionals are expanding into security is to meet those needs. I think what we need to do here is give the general IT practitioner a bit of credit, they've foreseen the problem, and are now looking to support that decision-maker."

More analysis of the report will be released in December.