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Web security 3.0: How the IT security industry views Web 2.0

Launchpad Europe survey of Infosec attendees compares & contrasts individual/corporate use of Twitter, Facebook; reveals social media trends & fears

London, UK – 27th May 2009 – A recent survey of 100 IT professionals at major IT security exhibition Infosecurity Europe revealed surprising trends in individual and corporate use of social media. The Launchpad Europe IT Security Index 2009 was intended to gauge IT professionals' attitudes towards social media, as well as to compare individual and corporate use of social media.

In contrast with the individual survey, in which 61 respondents reported to use Facebook, Twitter and other social media websites, only 21 out of 100 respondents reported that their organisations used social media. Eleven of those 21 organisations (52.38%) are using Twitter—an interesting contrast to the individual portion of the survey, in which only 15 of 61 individuals (24.59%) claimed to use Twitter. Facebook was by far the most popular among individuals, with 51 respondents claiming to use it. Fourteen reported to use other social media, including LinkedIn, LiveJournal and MySpace.

Mike Burkitt, director of European business accelerator [Launchpad Europe](http://www.launchpad-europe.com), said: *“Social media cannot be ignored by IT security professionals who know only too well that ignorance is not bliss and it is certainly no defense. No use are comments of ‘tweeter beware,’ ‘my Facebook lips are sealed’ or ‘I don’t know about Bebo.’ IT security professionals must embrace all aspects of the social media phenomenon to fully understand this constantly evolving hotbed for information leakage and social engineering-savvy hackers. My advice is to make yourself and your company fluent in IT security 3.0.”*

According to the survey, companies are more likely to update their websites on a daily basis than individuals are. Ten of the 21 organisations who reported to use social media also said they updated their websites at least once a day. Only a third (20/61) of individuals exerted the same effort; most individuals said they updated their social media websites once or twice a week.

Respondents were also asked to rate their concern about the security of social media on a scale of 1 to 5. Responses varied. Some respondents said that as IT security professionals, they understood the security issues surrounding social media and

were therefore less concerned. Other respondents said that as IT security professionals, they saw it as their job to be especially concerned about the security issues surrounding social media. On a scale of 1 to 5, the average concern level was 3.69.

Jon Collins, Service Director at analysts, FreeForm Dynamics, has some advice for companies concerned about online security: *“It is clear that we are entering new territory when it comes to the types of online threats that exist, let alone what should be done about them. While there are considerable business benefits to be had from social networking, we would urge organisations to recognise that it can be a two-edged sword, and deal with the risks accordingly.”*

“We accept social media as an insecure medium,” said Paul Guckian, a principal consultant at Delaney Consulting. *“We are aware it’s insecure and it’s public.”*

The simple solution, Guckian argued, is to understand the nature of the medium and to refrain from posting anything you wouldn’t want aired in a public forum.

But the public nature of social media might not yet be commonsense for children—and as one respondent pointed out, children will find a way to use social media whether their parents want them to or not.

“It can’t be stopped,” said Maureen Lamb. *“It’s just a matter of training children so they understand the risks.”*

Security was not the only issue concerning respondents. Several respondents expressed scepticism—and even contempt—about the long-term viability of social media for businesses. In response to the suggestion that businesses might benefit from the marketing advantages of social media, one respondent scoffed, *“Yeah, if you want to market your products to children.”*

Another respondent, Tom Newton of SmoothWall, said, *“People want to connect directly with individuals in companies. They don’t want to go on your corporate Twitter.”*

Newton went on to express a realistic attitude towards the security of social media. He pointed out that security is, has been, and always will be a concern in this world.

“Bad boys will always find a way to use 140 characters to do something naughty,” said Newton.

More results, analysis, and commentary on Launchpad Europe’s Countdown to Infosecurity [blog](#).

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- HR functionality

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