The Internet Protectors
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If you’re an information security professional, your entire social and family network regards you as the go-to person for all their questions, concerns, and panics about computer security. Every time something goes wrong with their PC, these folks are dialing your number or hitting you up via e-mail or instant messaging.

We all know that there is a huge amount of variably accurate security information on the Web. There are many blogs, forums, bulletin boards, white papers, podcasts, and Webinars – some posted by vendors, others by enthusiastic volunteers. The trouble is, there is no coherent resource for all types of computer security information in one place that is appropriate for all levels of expertise.

The arrival of social networking on the Internet provided the opportunity I’d been looking for to change this situation. Social networking sites let users set their own agenda for how they want to get information, following tags and topics to find their answers – exactly what was needed. I set about mapping just what a social network for information security might look like.

Although the site was not going to be totally tech-focused, clearly it would need to be able to deal with technical questions. Initial conversations with INFOSEC experts were encouraging; I got support from Roger Thompson, with whom I’d worked with at PestPatrol, Computer Associates, and Exploit Prevention Labs; Larry Bridwell, former consortium manager at the International Computer Security Association; and Graham Cluley at Sophos. There seemed to be general agreement that such a site would have value to the computer-using public at large. Recognized industry names like these would also give the site a degree of credibility from the start and help to secure funding to build the site.

Now we needed to come up with a name. Our goal was to give users the wherewithal to protect themselves online, so The Internet Protectors seemed to fit the bill. It embodies not only the online safety aspect but also the social-networking concept of users helping users.

As our team had all come from a technology background, it wasn’t surprising that our first effort was too close to existing tech-support sites. So we went back to the drawing board and, instead of focusing on what security advice sites looked like, looked at successful social networks.
This approach worked like a charm, and the second iteration of The Internet Protectors site was much closer to our goals. We had areas for blogging, forums, and resources. We had ways for users to talk to each other and to the site’s experts. Then it was on to plugging in content and recruiting experts in every area of security we could think of. We managed to fill most of our expert slots relatively easily, but locating enough content to make the site look and feel complete proved more of a challenge.

By September 2008, we were confident we’d done as much as we could, and our initial funding had run its course. Well, we thought, we’ll just do what everyone else does these days – stick a Beta label on the site, take a deep breath, and put it out there. So we sent out e-mails to all of our friends, relatives, and neighbors – you know, all those people who used to ask us for advice – to tell them about the site, and pressed the Go Live button on http://www.TheInternetProtectors.com. To our great relief, nothing broke, and people started to visit. Wow, we thought, we’ve actually done it!

Of course, a social network, more so than many Websites, is only as useful as its active participants, and only valuable if people know it’s there. So now we’re concentrating on keeping the content fresh and continuously reaching out to people to spread the word.

That’s where you come in.

We’d be very happy if Network World Security Strategies readers join in to provide content or to spread the word to fellow employees, family and friends – or both activities. Just drop us a line atmailto:info@TheInternetProtectors.com and help us make the Internet a safer place for everyone.

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Pat Bitton has been working in the computer security field for twenty years. She has been involved in creating marketing strategies for successful security firms such as Dr Solomon’s, Symantec, Trend Micro, PestPatrol, Exploit Prevention Labs, and AVG Technologies.

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