

The State of the Infosec Industry: Optimism for 2007

2006: The year in review

This year turned out to be a good one for information security (IS) professionals looking to advance their careers and find new opportunities. Corporations, professional services firms and product vendors all showed an increase in hiring activity in a variety of areas. This increase is due in part to the fact that new technologies and services require security professionals to get involved in a multitude of activities that will enable their companies to be competitive while remaining secure.

As 2006 unfolded, a number of our corporate clients began hiring in a few specific areas. Application security has continued to be a major focus as companies address the significant threats they face from application-related vulnerabilities and exposures. Candidates with the ability to develop internal programs to assess and remediate application vulnerabilities are in great demand, as are those who can educate developers on secure software engineering practices.

Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) continued to be a driving force behind increased staffing requirements. As a result of SOX, publicly traded companies and their business partners have been forced to develop and implement controls that guarantee the validity and security of their information assets. This led the beginning of the year off with an increased demand for IS professionals who could conduct SOX 404 assessment programs and provide the remediation strategies necessary to achieve compliance. Much of the SOX-driven hiring activity occurred in professional services firms. Beyond corporations and consulting firms, SOX has also influenced the security product vendor market. Many security vendors have repositioned or enhanced their products in an effort to develop solutions that address SOX requirements. Although hiring of SOX professionals was heavy in the start of 2006, demand tapered off greatly as the year progressed. In general, candidates with Identity and Access Management (IdAM) skills continue to be in high demand because IdAM solutions are necessary for ensuring the integrity of critical data by controlling user access and permission levels. IdAM has always been a critical part of an organization's security infrastructure, but with SOX and other regulatory requirements, it's more important than ever.

2006 proved also to be a year of consolidation, with many mergers and acquisitions. IBM bought ISS, BT Group bought Counterpane, McAfee bought Citadel Security Software, and SecureWorks bought LURHQ, just to name a few. I know someone who worked for three different companies in 2006 but never changed jobs. I believe we will see many vendor consolidations in 2007 as well.

Forecast for 2007

I believe 2007 holds a great deal of promise for information security practitioners. The economy is continuing its upward climb, and we anticipate continued increase in demand for qualified IS professionals in the first quarter.

Compliance and governance are areas where we anticipate much hiring activity. As regulatory requirements continue to evolve, corporations will direct their efforts to strengthen their assessment and remediation capabilities. Corporations are also looking at the new federal rules for e-discovery, and considering the impact of legal proceedings in terms of document retention, investigation and forensics,

and litigation support.

In 2006 (ISC)² and IT industry analyst firm IDC issued the “Global Information Security Workforce Study”¹, which will be the industry standard for workforce market research, trends, statistics and analysis in the IS profession. The report is intended to identify, analyze and present the important trends and issues, as well as the significant opportunities for coming years. The study reveals that the growth of the profession is driven by competing demands on industry and government to expand access to services and information; new stringent regulatory requirements; and the need for proactive solutions to circumvent emerging threats.

The study's participants had an average salary of \$80,750 USD and almost nine years of experience in the IS field. Fifty percent had bachelor's degrees and 34 percent had master's degrees. The industry continues to be male-dominated, with a slight increase of 2 percent for women participants, accounting for 13 percent of the total. The study confirms that IS executives are still struggling to get a seat at the table, with only a slight increase in participants reporting to executive-level management. Following suit, budgets for security spending are not expected to increase dramatically in 2007.

The good news is that the study also anticipates incremental but healthy growth in the IS industry in coming years, attributed to drivers in the marketplace such as government regulations, new technologies and proactive security. So I'm not alone in my optimism for the new year. The trick is to make sure you are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities as they unfold.

Certifications

One way to differentiate yourself from other candidates is to secure a certification in information security. The IDC study shows that 85 percent of security hiring managers consider certifications to be important in their hiring decisions, for the following reasons. First, a certification attests that an individual has obtained, and tested to, a predetermined level of knowledge in particular security domains. Second, certifications afford hiring managers some degree of comfort as to an individual's competency/knowledge level. If you haven't done so yet, make it a personal goal for 2007 to obtain an IS certification.

Conclusion

Regardless of the amount of growth 2007 will bring to our industry, one truth remains. There is an increasing trend with our most advanced security clients to utilize a risk-based approach to information security. In order to be successful, security practitioners must develop an understanding of the business their organizations are in, and be able to develop and communicate risk mitigation strategies to their clients and customers. Operational risk and governance are areas IS professionals need to start getting their arms around. It is more important than ever that security professionals understand the balance between business and technology, so they can make better risk-based security decisions in the coming year.

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1. <http://www.isc2.org/workforcestudy>