

Due to relocation in Al Khobar, Peter Thompson has resigned as Chairman of the COMMIT SIG. Until further notice, Martin Dickinson will assume the position of Acting Chairman.

Driving Licenses are not that old a concept. Indeed it was some time after the invention of the car that they became compulsory in some countries. The trend then grew and now its an accepted matter of every day life that they are a necessary evil.

However it took a long time before they were considered necessary. Simply to demonstrate that the driver had the requisite level of skill to control a car. Cars were getting faster and by definition more dangerous. Gone were the days when it was necessary for someone to walk in front of them waving a red flag. However that's really where the PC has reached now. They are becoming a liability rather than a benefit, especially in the hands of the unskilled.

On today's roads there are a number of bad drivers. There are those who are totally reckless whose driving will result in the deaths of others. Whilst the risks for road users are there and are life threatening, the risks for PC users are normally not as great and yet they could be. For instance a virus could effect your PC. Without you even knowing, it could send an email containing the virus to a Doctor you have listed in your address book. Once into his system it would then infiltrate a hospital. Perhaps even crash a system which controlled Life Support Systems

Most systems problems would not be so seriously life threatening. For the most part the risk is a financial one. Loss of a system or data for a period of time as they are recovered by the support section, whoever that might be. All of that costs time and money as well as a lot of frustration for customers, systems personnel and anyone else that might be impacted.

Here are two recent excerpts I have extracted from some of Security Journals I subscribe to:

"In my line of work it is inevitable, but always shocking, to see the number of high-risk security flaws developers have left behind. Most worryingly, a major proportion of vulnerabilities are due to a basic misunderstanding of the internet protocol and system software used to host or use the web application.

Too often the input of unexpected characters (e.g. single quote, plus, etc.), numbers or data lengths to submission fields, result in errors that reveal the inner workings of the application."

vnunet.com Bug Watch News Alert of 26 June 2002

"The rapid expansion of wireless networks in the past year, coupled with the fact that many IT staff don't bother to turn on encryption controls, has led to a new activity. Call it an attack, a drive-by hacking or theft of service, but it's known as war driving. The name is modelled after the term war dialling, from the early days of systems cracking, when users would use programs that automatically dial phone numbers to locate a modem tone and thus a computer. (Remember the 1983 movie War Games?) War driving is the 21st century's update to that old technique. Here, someone drives around an area

with a Wi-Fi-equipped laptop or even a personal digital assistant to discover just where wireless networks can be joined and, often, where an eavesdropper can obtain free high-speed Internet access.

Computerworld.com Security Journal of 24/6/02

It is a fact of life that Computers are complex, very, very complex. Windows alone has grown to well over 15 million lines of code. They are difficult to run and manage ... properly. They are fine when they come already set up and working. However come the day when a problem occurs or a new piece of software or hardware has to be installed. Then just where does that leave you especially when the whole experience seems so daunting to pose the question, just where do I start?

So here is the situation. PC users driving complex equipment very fast, not really knowing what risks are just around the corner and just around that corner the dangers of viruses, hackers and Trojan horses all of which will result in a very sorry state of affairs.

Seat belts are now mandatory in most countries, so it should be for a virus checker. As a matter of course if you are not running your PC with one then you are just asking for trouble. When buying a new PC ask if one comes as standard? If not then the likes of Norton and McAfee have good products and AVG supply one free for home use.

Similarly air bags provide added security that in the event of an accident you will be protected to an extent. Considered as essential nowadays, although not legally required, so are Firewalls. These will protect in the event of a hacker attack. There are a number that are available on the market and one from ZoneAlarm is again free for home use.

Don't even think that hacker attacks are unlikely to happen to you. They already are happening, albeit without your knowledge. In the space of just one minute my computer was attacked six times. In one evening others have reported attacks emanating from USA, Canada, Syria, Spain and Singapore to name just a few. They are happening constantly from everywhere in the world. And when you are connected to the Internet, then you are vulnerable.

Ignorance is fine. But the problem is it effects everybody and just because you might be infected as a result of insufficient protection, could mean that it infects a number of others. Resulting in much effort and distress as they lose much valued information and spend weary hours trying to recover what has been lost, if at all possible.

Clunk, click before you turn on that PC. Just consider this, especially in an ever more litigious world. If it was proven that you were the source of the virus, then someone might just take you to Court and if that someone was a very large organisation who lost a very large amount of money ...?

The day is not far off when it will be compulsory to take an exam for a PC License, simply to allow you to connect your PC to the Internet. In the meantime make sure your seat belt and air bags are installed and working.

COMMIT S.I.G.



Driving Licenses For PCs - Soon To be a reality



by
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