



Career Corner

Light in the Tunnel, and This Time it isn't the Train

By Jeff Combs

Introduction

Traditionally, the summer months are a time when hiring slows down, yet there has been a noticeable increase in activity this year. While I can't say that the security job market is back to its old self, things look encouraging. The current security job market might well be described as "schizophrenic." By that I mean that the available opportunities are spread across the country, at varying levels of responsibility and distributed widely between corporate, vendor, and professional services companies.

I'd like to provide readers with a brief snapshot of the types of roles that companies in the major market segments—corporations, product vendors and service providers, are hiring for.

Things Are Beginning to Look Up


Among our corporate clients there has been a resurgence of hiring activity. Many of these opportunities are focused on bridging the gaps between security, technology and the business units. To be specific, most large-scale organizations are building internal consulting teams. There are several reasons for this, and regardless of the vertical, the objectives of these teams are very similar. First, through consensus building and increasing awareness, they are working to build credibility with business units and change their perception of security as an obstacle. This is due partly to the fact that many companies have built engineering-driven security organizations that don't always understand the concepts of risk management and the need to balance security objectives with the needs of the business. Secondly, these teams are tasked with improving overall security by working closely with technology teams and business units on new and ongoing projects. By inserting security into the early stages of a project, there are fewer problems to address down the road. Working relationships are built that promote better cooperation and interdepartmental understanding. As a result, the security organization gains a better understanding of business drivers and end-users are made more aware of importance security plays in safeguarding their business.

When it comes to product vendors, it's still pretty wild out there. Due to lack of funding, there has been a fair amount of attrition among small product vendors. In many cases the companies and their technologies are solid, but paying customers don't have the budget to give them the orders and support they need to survive. There are also a number of new start-ups entering the scene, as well as companies that have been lying low and are now showing signs of life again. Like the corporate organizations mentioned above, vendors are also focusing a lot on perception management in the form of market positioning and new strategy development. There

has been a notable increase in the number of strategic development, product management and product marketing positions opening up. These organizations are going after new markets, developing new technologies, or re-packaging existing technologies. Some hot areas to watch are: application security, patch management and vulnerability remediation, remote access solutions, anti-spam offerings, wireless security, and security resource planning to name a few.

One of the hardest hit areas in security since the economic downturn has been the services industry. Massive budget reductions on the client side have sent many consulting firms into the red; this has resulted in the downsizing of talented consultants all across the country. Unfortunately, things haven't begun to improve dramatically...yet. It will still be a while, but as corporate clients free up more capital for outsourcing in the coming years, more consulting opportunities will open up. In the meantime, there are some areas that professional services organizations are hiring for. A number of companies are searching for digital forensics and incident-handling professionals to take advantage of growing opportunities in the area of litigation support. Another area of activity revolves around identity management. Due to the complexity of the challenges, client organizations are willing to go to the outside for help. Application security is another hot area. Few companies can allocate the internal resources needed when it comes to assessing and securing their Web and internal application environments. There are a number of consulting firms offering services to address these issues, and the demand should remain strong for several years. And finally, there is wireless security. The risks and vulnerabilities associated with wireless connectivity are a big deal, and a number of consulting firms are working hard to develop offerings that address their clients' wireless security concerns.

Conclusion

Things are getting better slowly but measurably. It's not the generalists' market that it was three years ago, but there are real opportunities out there. If you are interested in moving forward or just making a change, you can do it. The trick will be to focus on and develop the skills that are in demand and to differentiate yourself from others. It may not be easy, but by paying attention to what's going on in the big picture, honing your skills, and building solid professional relationships, you can reach your goals. Be patient, be diligent and be positive. Things are starting to look up again. 

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