

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

Security heroes

In our youth and throughout our lives, the scenario of the hero is thematic. And why not? We admire the courage to overcome adversity, the skill and tenacity that characterize overcoming the difficulties of life, saving the day, saving lives, individual skills and knowledge applied to the greater good, even at the sacrifice of the individual, and so forth.

Yet in our models of maturity, the “initial” level of capability is characterized as making it through via heroic individual efforts, and generally, we seek protective systems with higher levels of maturity. Organizations don't want heroes. They want systems that operate without the need for heroes. That's because people are cogs in the wheel of organizations. If a person loses a fingernail, it grows back, and with reasonable diligence, the loss is not fatal, nor does it really even substantially reduce the person's performance. Organizations seek a similar resilience.

Security villains

Organizations would also like to eliminate the villains, but unfortunately they refuse to go away. The systems we design, as much as they are intended to be resilient and mature, still remain brittle to the villains of the world. Security heroes, on the other hand, love the villains. Or at least that's what it looks like from afar. We always talk about them, want to name them, want to claim credit for helping to catch them, we keep trying to explain to bosses why we need heroes, and villains are one of the best ways to do it, because it works. Fear and resolution sell security.

Heroes need villains so they can be heroes. And villains need heroes so they can embarrass the heroes and claim superiority over them. It's all about...

Ego

People want to feel good about themselves. Some feel good about being rich, others about being strong. For the poor and weak among us, we need something else to feel good about. Some of us become villains and some become heroes. Fire fighters are heroes, but not all of us are suited for it. So some of us find our heroism in keeping people from being harmed by the symbolic representations that are, by definition, information. Some of us choose the dark side, or perhaps the dark side chooses us. Curiosity combined with the joy of quick wins makes for good attackers. The work feeds the egos of the heroes and villains among us. It makes us happy, so we keep doing it. And we beat our chests at security conferences, compete for the first to reveal the newest danger, and generally gain disdain by the organizations that are forced to use us or be abused by us. Nobody and no organization wants to spend on security. They do it because they feel they have no choice, and resent it.

Summary and conclusions

Heroes and villains, it's the old story from our ancient past. We play our roles and all the world is our stage. We stroke our egos and love ourselves for it. We stand proud and fight for what makes us feel good. So I'm changing my business card. Fred Cohen – Security Hero... nah...