

USENIX notes

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TO ROBERT HASKINS

Robert,

I just read "ISPadmin: Anti-Spam Roundup" in the October issue of *;login:*. I thought you might have been a bit more clear about reputation filtering with regard to DCC. DCC has offered reputation filtering with its commercial license for close to a year now. Vernon tests Solaris builds on USENIX's MX, so I don't know whether the commercial license

is revenue-generating. You might ping Vernon about it.

Otherwise I enjoyed your column, as always.

Tony Del Porto
Sysadmin, USENIX Association

ROBERT HASKINS REPLIES

Tony is indeed correct. The Rhyolite commercial solution Tony mentions combines IP reputation information from originating IP addresses with the DCC checksum data from messages, using data from paying subscribers only. Utilizing paying clients helps to eliminate the possibility of the checksum data getting contaminated by spammers wanting to get their junk through.

TO MARK BURGESS

Dear Sir,

To me *;login:* seems to reinvent the wheel in about every issue.

One of the other articles in *;login:* February 2006 is about Configuration Management. That is part of ISO 20000, so why reinvent it? In fact several other articles in earlier *;login:s* refer to problems and issues that are addressed in a structured manner (engineering-like) in ISO 20000, ISO 17799, and other international standards. I think it will benefit your magazine, and ICT in general, to refer to international standards when they are available. The standards are not absolute, so any discussion will benefit the community.

A practical suggestion: perhaps a thorough article on ISO 20000 (ITIL) may be a suitable start. There is a U.S. chapter of the user group, www.itsmf.com.

ISO 20000 was originally developed by users; that is one reason why it is useful. However, there are a number of tools that follow

the standard and may help implementation.

Until ICT quality is much improved, we are seen as hackers, not professionals.

It would be nice to have an answer, perhaps that I and ISO are both junk?

*Yours very truly,
Tore Audun Høie,
Ph.D. computer science*

MARK BURGESS REPLIES

My answer is simple:

ISO17799 (formerly BS17799) is a standard for heuristic security management in organizations, and ISO20000 (formerly BS15000) is the ITIL reference document. Both of these are high-level, handwaving guidelines about service and business operations. True enough, they pay lip service to configuration management, but the configuration management they refer to is not the same as discussed in *login*:—it concerns software and information organization and revision/change control. The technical problem covered in *login*: is more about automation, tuning, and maintenance in operating systems. The principles are somewhat similar, but these ISO documents offer no solutions to implementation, only finger-wagging “should do’s” to be complied with.

ADDENDUM TO ANNUAL TECH '06

2006 USENIX ANNUAL TECHNICAL CONFERENCE INVITED TALK

Hackers and Founders

*Paul Graham, Y Combinator
Summarized by Marc Chiarini*

[This summary was inadvertently omitted from the conference summaries published in the October 2006 login:. We apologize to the summarizer, the speaker, and our readers.]

Graham, a well-known hacker and essayist (and all-around nice guy) gave a thought-provoking and at times hilarious talk about the power of the marginal. He began with an observation by his friend Trevor Blackwell. On a trip to the Apple garage, Blackwell who hails from Saskatchewan, was amazed at how dedicated Jobs and Wozniak must have been to work in a garage. “Those guys must have been freezing!” Graham pointed out that the mild climate of Silicon Valley, which has sprouted quite a few famous startups, encourages work on the margins, where there is more incentive to tinker and much less need to justify the use of well-heated indoor spaces. There is a paradox, however: even though many hackers and founders come from and work best on the margins, many also crave acceptance by the mainstream. This is not a good thing; most great ideas come from the margins. Graham made a witty attempt at explaining why this is so and what can be done to encourage the process.

He touched on many core ideas: the disadvantages of “insider” (mainstream) projects, illustrated via analogy with the government commissioning the writing of the Great American Novel; ways of determining in what fields it’s worth trying to become an insider, including evaluation of the tests that admit you and the quality of existing insiders (from a practitioner’s point of view); why big companies frequently get blind-sided by startups, because the employees continually undergo tests for the wrong qualities; how outsider success hinges on corrupt tests selecting ineffectual insiders with lots of money, followed by fair tests such as the marketplace, where, thanks to the Internet, ideas are increasingly promotable on a level playing field.

Graham provided a veritable guidebook for success as an outsider: In any field, even in those with honest tests for inner-circle admission, outsiders don’t have much to lose; they can take risks again and again, with few people noticing their failures. Tradition should generally be shunned, as the state of the art changes much faster these days and the space of possibilities is ever growing. Nor can outsiders allow their lives to become scheduled; it’s not good for thinking. Long, uninterrupted blocks of time allow broad tinkering. It’s also essential for outsiders to stay in direct contact with the latest platforms, programming languages, and other technologies. Delegation, especially in the starting phases of an “unplanned” project, is a death knell; if you are not doing almost all the work yourself, you stop learning. Outsiders must find problems that can be solved in one person’s head (like the Woz building the hardware and software for the Apple II). One way is to focus on the places where tasks are normally divided: create a programming language and, instead of shotgunning it to other hackers, build something useful with it and hand that off. Since outsiders don’t have the benefit of highly focused training, they can cast a wide net, creating new interdisciplinary projects for themselves, learning enough in each area to hack together something brand new. Finally, working on small things provides quick gratification and the ability to make do with less.

The remainder of Graham’s talk focused on how to make up for what insiders often have—for instance, an audience, money, nonmaterial resources—without becoming like them. His concluding advice was to try just hacking things together; when people complain that you’re

unqualified or that what you've been doing is "inappropriate," you know you're on the right track!

In the Q&A, people asked what it takes to be a good startup founder. You need to be unbelievably determined, you have to have a good sense of design, and you have to be outgoing enough to speak with other people. Q: How does one make something marginal catch on? A: Start with other hackers and early adopters (Google was a great example, no marketing, just word of mouth). Q: What is the path to startup success? A: The most important thing is to make something that other people want or, better yet, need. Q: How do you know when to let something you've created run its course or to intervene in its development? A: You cannot hose yourself by open-sourcing everything and letting people play. Q: How do you know when something has failed and it's time to try your next foolish idea? A: Collect good friends whose opinion you trust, and always be open to suggestions.

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

Ellie Young
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As many of our members know, USENIX's success is attributable to a large number of volunteers, who lend their expertise and support for our conferences, publications, and member services. They work closely with our small staff in bringing you the best there is in the fields of systems research and system administration. Many of you have participated on program committees, steering committees, and subcommittees and in SAGE, as well as contributing to this magazine. We are most grateful to you all. I would like

to make special mention of the following individuals who made significant contributions in 2006.

The program chairs for our 2006 conferences:

Larry Peterson and Timothy Roscoe, NSDI '06

Atul Adya and Erich Nahum, 2006 USENIX Annual Technical Conference

Mahadev Satyanarayanan and Nigel Davies, MobiSys 2006

Steven M. Bellovin, SRUTI '06

Matt Blaze and Angelos D. Keromytis, First HotSec Workshop

Dan Wallach and Ron Rivest, first Electronic Voting Technology Workshop

Angelos D. Keromytis, USENIX Security '06

Ted Ts'o, 2006 Linux Kernel Developers Summit

David Andersen and Neil Spring, WORLDS '06

Brian Bershad and Jeff Mogul, OSDI '06

Michi Henning and Maarten van Steen, Middleware 2006

William LeFebvre, LISA '06

Invited Talks/special track chairs:

Chris Small and Matt Blaze, Invited Talks for 2006 USENIX Annual Technical Conference

Patrick McDaniel and Gary McGraw, Invited Talks for USENIX Security '06

David N. Blank-Edelman and Doug Hughes, Invited Talks for LISA '06

Philip Kizer, Guru Is In Coordinator for LISA '06

Some other major contributors:

Balachander Krishnamurthy for his continued efforts in obtaining sponsorships and providing guidance for SRUTI

Alva Couch for liaising with VEE and HotAC, co-sponsored by USENIX

Avi Rubin and ACCURATE for helping organize our first Electronic Voting Technology Workshop

Peter Honeyman for his efforts in outreach to the international community, e.g., the SANE and Middleware conferences

Michael B. Jones for serving as liaison to the Computing Research Association

Matt Blaze, Clem Cole, Alva Couch, Rémy Evard, Jon "maddog" Hall, Michael B. Jones, Marshall Kirk McKusick, Niels Provos, Margo Seltzer, and Theodore Ts'o for their service on the USENIX Board of Directors in 2006

Jon "maddog" Hall for holding auctions for contributions to the John Lions Chair in Operating Systems at the University of New South Wales

Dan Geer, Theodore Ts'o, and Marshall Kirk McKusick for serving on the USENIX audit committee

Clem Cole, Peter Salus, Keith Packard, John Gilmore, Jim McGinness, and Jon "maddog" Hall for serving on the USENIX awards committee

Rob Kolstad and Don Piele for their work with the USA Computing Olympiad, co-sponsored by USENIX

SAGE UPDATE

Greetings from USENIX. We've been busy, working hard on the upcoming LISA conference and a fantastic new SAGE Web site. Take a look at what's been happening with SAGE.

LISA ONSITE REGISTRATION, GROUP DISCOUNTS, AND COMMUNITY MEETINGS

The LISA Program Committee and USENIX have put together a high-caliber slate of tutorials for LISA '06. There's something for everyone, whether their speciality is storage, networks, security, or jack-of-all-trades sysadmin. It's not too late to register—in fact, it's the perfect time, lest you find that your annual conference fell victim to somebody's Q4 budget squeeze. Onsite registration opens at 5 p.m. on Saturday, December 2. Bring your manager and your colleagues, and qualify for the multiple-employee discount by taking 5 or more people to LISA:
<http://www.usenix.org/events/lisa06/>.

JOIN US AT LISA—SAGE COMMUNITY MEETING ON DECEMBER 6

We've scheduled the SAGE Community Meeting for Wednesday night, December 6, and we hope to see a large presence there. We value the input you have given us to keep SAGE on track, so please keep it coming.

NEW SAGE WEB GOES LIVE

It's here! The new SAGE Web site is live, and it's a lean, clean, information machine! We listened to your feedback and gave you the same no-nonsense interface that works so well on the USENIX site, with all the features you expect from SAGE: Jobs Board, Speakers Bureau, and so on. The new site is more than just skin-deep, though: Content has been updated and expanded throughout, and new functionality has been written in. Check it

out and learn more about SAGE at <http://www.sage.org>.

JOHN LIONS FUND—LAST CALL

You may recall that in the April issue (p. 80) we announced that USENIX was matching donations to the fund to establish an endowed Chair in Operating Systems at the University of New South Wales. The period of matching donations is rapidly drawing to a close.

To double the value of your contribution, make your donation before December 31, 2006. Send a check to:

John Lions Fund
 USENIX Association
 2560 Ninth St., Suite 215
 Berkeley, CA 94710

or donate online at
<http://www.usenix.org/about/lionsfund/>

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.
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