

A Rich Vein: Huebner's New Blog

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Recently I found out that my friend and colleague Prof Richard Huebner <<http://www.linkedin.com/in/richhuebner> > began a new blog <<http://www.db-geek.com/> > in May 2012. I interviewed Rich for our InfoSec Perception column.

1) Rich, tell us about your career.

I began using computers at age 10, when I learned how to program in BASIC on a Vic-20 and Apple IIc/IIe. I began my career in the early 1990s while working for an Internet service provider, called TIAC (The Internet Access Company). I began working as a customer service representative – it was dial-up at the time, with a maximum speed of about 56kbaud. Since then, I've had the pleasure of working for some pretty big places, including AstraZeneca, National Grid, John Hancock, in senior level positions in customer support, project management, and database administration. I've also had the opportunity to work with Harte-Hanks Data Technologies, Northern Power Systems, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). One of my recent accomplishments is the development and implementation of two new systems to optimize the work done by a team of 30 analysts working to resolve data-quality problems. Within days of implementing these systems, the productivity of all of the analysts skyrocketed. I was also able to eliminate much of the paper work being done by those analysts.

After a two-year hiatus from teaching, I came back to Norwich University <<http://www.norwich.edu> > in the fall of 2011. I am now entering my ninth non-consecutive year of teaching full time in higher education, and have also taught as an adjunct for Kaplan University <[URL](#) >, Champlain College <[URL](#) >, Eastern Nazarene College <[URL](#) >, and Mount Vernon Nazarene University <[URL](#) >.

The faculty and students at Norwich are fantastic people. On any given day, I get to work with the smartest people I have ever had the pleasure of working with – and that's what keeps me energized. Two of my friends, Drs M. E. Kabay and Peter R. Stephenson are people whom I deeply admire and look up to in terms of their kindness, professionalism, and mentoring and always get me energized when I'm around them! [MK adds: OK, Rich, we'll transfer the payment after this article is published!] I hope to stay with Norwich University for a very long time – it's one of the best places I've ever worked.

2) I see an increasing focus on security in your writing – when and why did you become interested in information security?

The DHS position I mentioned before was as a contractor working with the Fugitive Operations Support Centre (FOSC), in Williston, VT securing US borders from illegal and criminal aliens. It was absolutely fascinating and pushed my interest in security to the next level.

When I began my PhD studies at Nova Southeastern University <[URL](#) >, the school was offering several security courses and if I took them, I would get a graduate certificate in information

assurance/security. I've been interested in security since I began my computing career in the early 90s, I remember learning about Kevin Mitnick, Cap'n Crunch, and people like Steve "Woz" Wozniack. There were hackers in the true sense of what hacking used to mean. Today hacking means something bad, usually. Those guys were geniuses when it came to tinkering, so at the time I looked up to them even though I later realized that they sometimes broke laws. As I grew in my career, I realized that attacks could come from the person sitting in the next cube – not that I became paranoid, but I realized that attacks could come from anywhere. The attacks of 9/11 also made me (and many other people) realize that security is extremely important on many, many levels – from a national level down to a single firewall or intrusion detection system sitting in a network closet in the back office.

I decided to focus most of my energy reading and writing on the insider-threat phenomenon. I was very highly motivated by a former professor, who still believes that an attack is an attack is an attack. I disagree. Different types of attacks need different types of responses, and the insider threat is certainly complex enough to warrant different types of mitigation strategies.

3) Tell us about your plans for your new blog. Who's it for? What do you want readers to gain from your writing?

My overall goal is to make databases and database design more accessible to those who want to learn more, but don't necessarily want to learn every possible detail.

Part of the reason why I began this blog is simply to get my thoughts out and expand my reach so that others may be interested by some of the work that I do. My interests are pretty varied, from insider-threat research, to hands-on database design and development. The blog is being marketed to people who are not necessarily experts, but who want to learn more about various topics in database theory and information assurance. I make my posts straightforward and short and explain complex topics in a way that I hope will be accessible to anyone who wants to learn.

I'm also using the blog as a way to monetize some of the software and short e-books that I've developed along the way. For example, I have an 80-page booklet that I'm working on that discusses how to use MySQL and is a highly visual tutorial. The e-book assumes that you do not have a background in databases, either. I'd like to see the booklet being used more widely and will be making it available online soon.

In late May 2012, I met a wonderful person by the name of Jaime Utt < <http://www.jamieutt.com/index/Home.html> >, who is a speaker on diversity and inclusion < <http://www.cultureofcivility.com> >. I saw him speak at the Vermont Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership (HOBY) < <http://www.hobyvt.org/> > seminar, and we got to talking. He mentioned that he and his production company were having issues with their Websites, so I offered to help. Jaime introduced me to Eric Thompson < <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/eric-thompson/44/77b/477> >, CEO of Global Ascension Productions < <http://www.globalascensionproductions.com/> >. Eric is an executive coach who has agreed to help me better brand myself, and will be providing his coaching to me in exchange for essentially being his chief information security officer (CISO). It is a bartering agreement, so no money is exchanged. I don't really want his money, either – what I really needed was his brilliance. He gets my expertise in return for providing me with his. Eric has been instrumental in helping me establish my blog, what I should be doing, and in marketing my own brand, and helping me unleash my own talents.

4) What are some of the key issues you plan to address in upcoming months?

I'm working on two series this summer: the first is on insider threats, and the second is on SQL injection issues. The insider threat problem is still heavily researched and there are plenty of proposed models and strategies for dealing with them, but I don't see evidence of their actually being used in practice. Essentially, I'm attempting to close the research/practice gap in coping with insider threats. In a forthcoming post, I'll be discussing two of the behavioural models we can use to help us begin identifying and mitigating insider threat risks.

SQL injection is such a hot topic right now that I had to chime in because I see some misinformation out there on the topic. Many folks most likely have a cursory understanding of it, so it's my hope that I can help solidify people's understanding of it and clear up any misconceptions.

5) What's your approach to handling comments from readers – and spam from creeps – on your blog? What are your thoughts about moderated lists and “anonymous coward” postings?

I have several Wordpress< <http://wordpress.org/> > plugins that I use to keep tabs on comments. For example, one plugin will blacklist a post if it contains one of about 200 swear words or defamatory language. There are unfortunately a lot more words I could use to weed out profanity, but this is a start! Another plugin is specifically designed to exclude spam. Many of the pages on my site don't allow comments or feedback; however, most of the posts will allow moderated commentary. There may be some unmoderated discussions as well.

I'm also working on a member-only section to provide access to more depth and one-page executive summaries of various topics.

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