

PANEL: SECURITY AND THE USER

Panel Chair: Win Treese (Open Market, Inc., United States)
Peter Neumann, SRI
Mary Ellen Zurko, Iris Associates
Mark Ackerman, University of California at Irvine

It is an axiom for security systems that the users are the weakest link. In spite of this, most security work, whether in research, commercial products, or deployed systems, has focused on the technological issues rather than the human ones.

The changing nature of computer users makes this problem all the more acute. As the Internet is used more and more for new applications requiring high levels of security, such as commerce, home banking, and others, a new class of users is part of the picture. And with these users, there is no way to enforce a security policy, because they are not employees. Rather, they must be able to use the secure system easily and effectively. If they cannot, they will simply take their business elsewhere.

In system design, it is often said that there is a fundamental trade-off between usability and security. In trying to attract customers, rather than imposing some rules, it might seem that usability will always win out. But is this a fundamental trade-off? Are there approaches to design that allow us to satisfy these goals simultaneously? Will users understand what the security issues are, and have some idea about what the system is doing? Or are we helpless against a sea of uninformed, confused users?

In this panel session, we will examine some of these problem areas, the lessons of history, and how the security community might better address these problems.