

BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

Defeating the Hacker

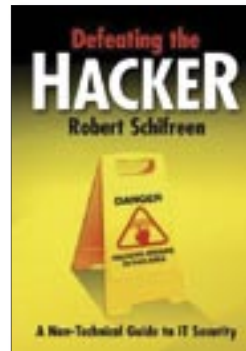
Defeating the Hacker has very few details about the in-depth technical aspects of preventing hacking. However, with a subtitle like “A Non-Technical Guide to IT Security,” the lack of technical detail is quite understandable.

The book is not completely devoid on any technical information, and I would not say that the information provided is too superficial. However, if you are looking for nuts-n-bolts details on securing your server network, particularly in a Linux environment, you would definitely be better served elsewhere.

On the other hand, for the managers or sysadmins who need to explain the problem to non-techies, this is an excellent book. The author has a very easy going style, and he makes very technical subject matter seem easy. I actually *wanted* to continue reading it, although I was already familiar with the concepts.

Another nice feature is that the material is broken down into small, easy-to-digest chunks. Whereas some books have a single chapter on some generic subject like “Server Security” that tries to cover everything even remotely connected with a server, this book splits the topic into individual chapters. Thus you are not overwhelmed with a deluge of facts. Instead, you get bit-sized pieces, and each chapter is rounded out with a list of the “Fundamental Five” most important aspects of the topic.

I was hard pressed to find a topic that the author did not at least mention. Subjects range from applicable laws and standards (albeit geared toward the UK) to email and the Internet. You’ll find sta-



tistics on how often a particular problem occurs, the costs the problem can incur, and real-world stories about companies that fell victim to a particular form of attack. All of this tends to drive home the urgency of the problem, as opposed to other books that discuss the subject

simply as a series of cold facts.

The author provides a nice introduction to each subject, and the book is filled with references for where to look for more details.

Robert Schifreen

391 Pages

J. Wiley and Sons

0-470-02555-7

£ 18.00, US\$ 29.99, EUR 29.30

Designing Interfaces

This book is not a silver bullet for creating a great user interface (UI), but it definitely starts you on the path to making your own bullets. The subject of designing a user interface is not easy to address in one book; even if the book were pure text and no pictures, the author would still not have been able to address every single aspect of the topic. And this problem is compounded by the fact that you *have* to take up space with pictures to get your point across.

For me, the best part about this book is that it got me thinking. First, I got thinking about many of the things I take for granted when interacting with user interfaces. Second, I started thinking about why

certain designs were more efficient than others. That got me thinking about all the user interfaces I currently have control over (i.e., my own websites and the company’s wiki) and how I could improve their useability.

However, simply thinking about these problems is not enough. The author does go into details about the various as-



pects of UI design. Each element of a UI is broken down into a handful of key considerations, such as what it is, when it is used, why it should be used, and how it should be used, and the discussion is followed with one or more real-world examples. This approach makes the book a good

reference if you find yourself in the middle of a development project and want some quick guidance.

Some people today tend to think of user interfaces only in terms of the Internet or PDAs. This book reminds us that there are still problems that apply to traditional desktop applications.

At a couple of places, I thought the book could have used a little more background information before jumping in with the details. However, I don’t really want to ding the author on that, since overall I found the book very easy to read and the information very accessible.

Jenifer Tidwell

331 Pages

O’Reilly Media, Inc.

0-596-00803-1

£ 35.50, US\$ 49.95, EUR 48.00