FUD

We live in a world in which "security" has become an institution. In today's world it is a word with an incredible impact and reach…

There is not a single newspaper, magazine or news program that does not have articles related to security. Whether it is the war on terror, hackers getting into computer systems, violence or war, everything seems to be tied to security. It almost seems as if the world has become a much more insecure place than ever, but is that really true? I think a lot of what we experience is in the eye of the beholder.

In our industry, security is synonymous with the security related to the systems and infrastructures we use. Recently the discussion about this information security has led to an explosion of companies operating in the security business. Security has become a product, in different sizes and shapes. True, when building networks, linking systems and building environments in which everything is accessible and information is available to everyone a risk is introduced that people may be tempted to do something malicious with this capability. But are the risks as high as we are made to believe?

I find that a lot of people are driven by Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt or FUD. This FUD is in many cases being spread by organizations and individuals that use it for their own benefit. This FUD culture has been fed by claims regarding risks, attacks and even cases where severe problems have arisen in the electric infrastructure based on a lack of security. It may be just me, but where is the proof for these claims? I may have missed something, but there does not seem to be a whole lot of evidence to support all the stories that I hear and read.

Of course in a networked environment it makes sense to consider and evaluate the vulnerabilities and the associated risks of a system, a company an infrastructure. A security policy to manage these vulnerabilities and limit the risks also makes sense and investing in solutions therefore is natural. But there is one thing that makes me think and wonder. In my family we believe that fear is a bad advisor and that it is better to use your common sense instead of following your gut feeling based on fear, uncertainty or doubt. So why do so many people let themselves be influenced by the FUD that others are spreading? I think it is because modern systems and technologies are perceived to be complex, abstract, virtual and sometimes even incomprehensible. This leads to a situation in which many people consider themselves not knowledgeable enough to get involved in the discussion and thus start avoiding the topic. And thus the one-eyed becomes a leader in the land of the blind. So are all security specialists bad? No, of course not! There are many excellent companies and individuals that provide services and solutions that seriously decrease the vulnerabilities and risks that can exist in networked solutions.

So what to do? My dad always says that the best way out of trouble is straight through it. So my advice is to face security as any other engineering challenge - understand the vulnerabilities and risks, as well as the possibilities to create solutions for a secure power system, and then engineer these solutions. Make use of people and organizations that can be of assistance in that process and do not let yourself be led by FUD. So change your FUD into knowledge, policies, strategies and solutions.

So Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt are quickly replaced by Trust, Reliability, Intelligence, Certainty and Knowledge.

I am sure that will do the TRICK.

Biography

Marco C. Janssen graduated the Polytechnic in Arnhem, The Netherlands and developed further his professional skills through programs and training courses. He is President and Chief Commercial Officer of UTInnovation LLC – a company that provides consulting and training services in the areas of protection, control, substation automation and data acquisition, and support on the new international standard IEC 61850, advanced metering and power quality. He is a member of WG 10, 17, 18, and 19 of IEC TC57, the IEEE-PES and the UCA International Users Group.