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Earlier this year I joined InfraGard® (www.infragard.net) – a public/private partnership with the United States Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). The purpose of InfraGard is to provide the FBI with "front line" eyes and ears regarding threats to infrastructure assets (such as utilities and transportations hubs) and facilitate the sharing of intelligence and information. I was aware of InfraGard having received a security in the workplace certification from the organization but I was not a formal member until this year.

The timing of my membership could not have been better as shortly after my acceptance was approved InfraGard had their first-ever national conference right here in South Florida. The focus of the one-day event was to highlight how the public and private sectors are working together to meet current and future security threats. By my estimation the attendee count was approximately 250 and I met plenty of attendees from out-of-state. Speakers represented private sector companies and federal and state government agencies.

While all the sessions and speakers were interesting, I was particularly drawn to a statement by one of the presenters when he said that the physical world is being replicated in cyberspace. Consider that what was once the domain of the physical world – commerce, finance, enjoyment/entertainment, socializing, addictions, scams & frauds, credentials, and social engineering – are all now deeply entrenched in what the online world has to offer.

Inasmuch as cyberspace has created a multitude of opportunities, it also creates a unique set of challenges in terms of authenticity, health, integrity, safety, and security. As several speakers pointed out from their various vantage points, these challenges are only getting more complex as they become more intertwined and technology advances beyond the speed at which security and risk professionals can keep up with it.

It is somewhat difficult to remove oneself completely from some of these potential perils. Employers tend to check Linked In®, Klout® and other web sites to learn details of a candidate behind the resume, so not being "out there" professionally might damage job prospects, and a lack of contacts could inhibit the job search itself. Online shopping is a terrific convenience for the harried and hectic among us and provides the opportunities to uncover treasures (and bargains) not found on store shelves.

It would not be too difficult to get really paranoid about how much data there is out there about us and how much it is shared (sold) to be combined with other data and profile a person. Nor would the concerns be far from the truth: there is more happening with our detailed data then we realize. Just as the prudent person will take practical safety and security measures in the physical world, so too should such measures be taken in cyberspace. It may not be practical – or possible – to withdraw from the virtual world developing around us anymore than we can withdraw from the physical world we exist in. We simply have to learn to live in both and keep our wits about us as we travel in each world and traverse from one to the other.

Be smart and be safe.

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