

Cisco CEO to use 'holistic' security

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Network security is evolving from a "pinpoint" system of attacking isolated threats to a large-scale "holistic" approach to security, said John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems, at the 2006 RSA Conference.

"Assume employees are going across a lot of networks," Chambers said. "So you have to build in security from the home to any number of networks."

Chambers also stressed the importance of developing self-defending networks that can find, isolate and eliminate threats.

"We're working toward the ability for all Cisco devices to work together and communicate with each other to stop attacks," Chambers said at the conference. "The idea is that one device can warn another device of a threat."

Chambers also said that companies will need to work together to produce the kinds of thorough security technology needed.

"The only way to solve security problems is through partnering," he said.

Paul Kurtz, executive director of the Cyber Security Industry Alliance, said he thinks Chambers' view on security is useful.

"The news is that Chambers laid out a vision that is logical," he said.

Kurtz said Chambers' ideas on companies partnering to develop security

strategies is noteworthy.

"There is no one company that is going to secure the Internet," he said. "It will take a combination of companies and a combination of technologies. Partnership between organizations is the way we need to think."

At the RSA Conference, an annual gathering of security professionals that took place all this week in San Jose, Chambers noted that wireless networking opens the door for new risks that security has to address.

"Sometimes employees are on wired networks and sometimes wireless networks," he said. "So you can't design security differently for wired or wireless."

"Security has to happen at the infrastructure," Chambers added.

Kurtz agreed that security professionals have to pay special attention to the emerging wireless technologies.

"Anytime you have new technology being widely deployed, it creates a new opportunity for mischief," he said.

Kurtz added that even though securing wireless networks creates a greater vulnerability threat, companies should not shy away from using them.

Chambers said that inevitably, technology makes things smaller and cheaper, which allows them to be used more prevalently.

"The next-generation network will be one-sixteenth the cost of what it is today," he said.

He noted as an example Cisco's Adaptive Security Appliance 5500, which was debuted last May. It combined 18 security functions that Cisco previously had sold separately into one device.

Kurtz noted that while Chambers had many useful ideas, his speech was not the be-all of security.

"Chambers laid out Cisco's vision of how to approach the problem," he said. "It's important but it isn't a panacea. We have to look at the entire ecosphere of a network to secure it."

Kurtz said there is a "crisis of trust" on the Internet causing consumers to shy away.

"People are starting to hesitate to engage in e-commerce," he said. "That's bad for the economy overall, not just the online economy."

Kurtz said that companies need to put a clear focus on their security activity, by categorizing their assets, understanding the vulnerabilities of those assets, and applying technology to secure them

"There needs to be a policy in place," he said of individual companies. "They need to think about security from the ground up."

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