

White House picks new cyber coordinator

December 22 2009, By LOLITA C. BALDOR , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The White House has tapped a corporate cyber security expert and former Bush administration official to lead the effort to shore up the country's computer networks and better coordinate with companies that operate 80 percent of those critical systems.

Howard A. Schmidt, a former eBay and Microsoft executive, will become the government's [cyber security](#) coordinator, weathering a rocky selection process that dragged on for months, as others turned the job down.

President [Barack Obama](#) is expected to make the announcement Tuesday, according to a senior White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision had not been made public yet.

Schmidt's selection comes more than 10 months after Obama declared cyber security a priority and ordered a broad administration review.

The official said Obama was personally involved in the selection process and chose Schmidt because of his unique background and skills. Schmidt will have regular and direct access to the president for cyber security issues, the official said.

Obama released the findings of the cyber security review nearly seven months ago, vowing that the White House would name a cyber coordinator to deal with one of the "most serious economic and national security challenges we face as a nation."

Corporate computer security leaders have openly expressed frustration with the White House as movement on the job post stalled.

At the same time, cyber experts and potential job candidates have complained that the position lacks the budgetary and policy-making authority needed to be successful. Schmidt will report to the National Security Council and closely support the National Economic Council on cyber issues.

Schmidt's selection suggests that economic and business interests in the White House held more sway in the selection process. Schmidt, president and CEO of the Information Security Forum, a nonprofit international consortium that conducts research in information security, has served as chief security officer for Microsoft and as cyber security chief for online auction giant [eBay](#). He was reportedly preferred by Lawrence Summers, director of the economic council.

Roger Thornton, a cyber security expert and chief technology officer for Fortify Software, praised the choice. He said Schmidt understands the technology, has broad management experience and has worked well within the political arena, a key requirement for the [White House](#) post.

"I think he would be able to get people to compromise and move things forward," said Thornton.

U.S. government computer systems are being attacked or scanned millions of times a day. Hackers and cyber criminals pose an expanding threat, using increasingly sophisticated technologies to steal money or information, while nation-states probe for weaknesses in order to steal classified documents or technology or destroy the networks that run vital services.

Considered an expert in computer forensics, Schmidt's roughly 40-year

career includes 31 years in local and federal government service, including a stint as vice chairman of President George W. Bush's Critical Infrastructure Protection Board. He also was for a short time an adviser to the FBI and worked at the National Drug Intelligence Center.

Congress members, business leaders and cyber security experts have called for a more coordinated effort by the federal government to monitor and protect U.S. systems and work with the private sector to insure that transportation systems, energy plants and other sensitive networks are equally protected.

More information: On the Net: White House:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov>

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