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2012 Cyber Security Summit

On September 12, 2012, the first Cyber Security Summit (CSS) took place in Bonn. Its initiators, the Munich Security Conference and Deutsche Telekom, intended that the event would provide new stimuli for Germany as a secure cyber-location. The summit brought together 75 leading personalities from the fields of industry and politics to initiate discussions of the threat level and structures of cross-functional and cross-sector collaboration. The discussions of the various working parties have been summarized in a series of articles.

Report on the Media Workshop

“Media sector under pressure”

Dangers from the Internet threaten media companies not only in the form of computer viruses or hacker attacks – manipulation and opinion-forming on the Internet impose particular pressure on editors and publishers.

On the morning of September 10, 2009, a German news magazine received a call from a man who claimed to be working for a TV station in the American town of Bluewater. He reported that there had been an attack on a restaurant in the small town in California. According to eyewitness reports, the perpetrators came from an Arab background. It was still not clear whether there were any casualties. The news item was picked up by various German agencies and media and its correctness was checked via the websites of the broadcaster, the local authority and a call to the local fire brigade registered there.

During the day it turned out that there had never been any attack in Bluewater. The so-called TV station did not exist, the town and broadcaster websites had been set up on the Internet the day before the alleged attack. The alleged spokesman for the fire brigade was an actor. The whole thing turned out to be a PR campaign by two German directors who were using it to advertise their new film – and proved at the same time how easy it was to spread and support false news items with the help of the Internet, and how opinions and media could be manipulated.

Whilst the Bluewater case can be considered as just a PR stunt, the most recent attacks – as participants in the discussion pointed out – were highly sensitive. In August 2012, hackers using the name of the Reuters news agency published on the agency's blog platform incorrect news items about the conflict in Syria – in an evident attempt to whip up hostility toward the Syrian rebels.

Attack target and mission to inform

This is only one of the threats with which the media sector is confronted through the constantly growing use of the Internet. The working group for Media also agreed that the increasing importance of the Internet and the danger posed by cyber-attacks for the sector might give rise to a new area of conflict: Whilst on the one hand, media companies themselves are potential targets and victims of cyber-attacks, on the other hand, part of their duty to inform involves reporting on similar incidents involving companies and organizations in other sectors – frequently in the teeth of efforts from those affected to hush up the events as far as possible. In addition, media companies are often themselves required to use the Internet to disseminate their own content.

Dependency on high visitor numbers to their own websites to make these attractive to advertising customers also places classic media companies under serious economic pressure. There is a risk of accepting false news items at face value and publishing them, if they promise a large number of visitors to the site.

More self-control and media skills

Due to its speed and range, the Internet has surpassed the classic media in their role as "public opinion shapers." But it involves the risk that search engines store the likes and interests of users and supply them with targeted news items in which they find their own beliefs represented. This may lead to biased information which in turn can play into the hands of criminal or extremist groups.

The fact that new media always bring significant social changes in their wake is well known. The experts believe that it is up to the media sector to increase self-control and self-regulation in researching and disseminating content. But they also state that the public sector, too, has a responsibility to promote media skills – particularly among young people.