Getting Your Session Proposal Accepted in 2013

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Session ID: AST2-401

Session Classification: General Interest

Agenda

- General Information

- Call for Speakers Process

- Behind the Scenes – Program Committee Selection Process

- The 7 Mortal Sins (and Wins) of Session Submission … and then some

RSA® Conference 2013 Timeline

- Call for Speakers open: early July 2012
- Call for Speakers close: late August 2012

  (all dates approximate)

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FEBRUARY 25 – MARCH 1 | MOSCONE CENTER | SAN FRANCISCO

What Are Delegates Looking For

- Information/learning they can apply to their jobs

- Best practices/lessons learned

  - Real implementation stories/ detailed case studies

- Intermediate to advanced materials

  - Gear to experienced security professionals

  - No entry- level or definitions

- Good speakers, experts, luminaries

- No product or solution pitches

Delegate Demographics (2011)

Primary Lines of Business
- Computer Security 20%
- Computer Technology & Communications 20%
- Government 12%
- Financial Services 14%

Top Functional Groups
- Information Security & Information Technology 54%
- Fraud Detection/ Prevention 20%

Company Position
- VP & higher 13%
- Director 15%
- Manager 22%
- Senior Professionals 21%

Security Experience
- 10+ years in security   45%
- Time spent overseeing, managing, or implementing information security projects 56%
- (ISC)[2] members 31%

Submission Process: Topics and Tracks

- Tracks are determined annually based on
  - Previous year's metrics
  - Security issues/events over the year
- Tracks not finalized/ published until agenda goes public
- Submissions have choice of ~23 topic selections
- Submissions assigned to 12 tracks

Submission Topics 2012

- Applications and Development
- Business of Security
- Cloud Security & Virtualization
- Cyberwarfare & Cybercrime
- Data Security
- Endpoints
- Governance, Risk & Compliance
- Hackers and Threats
- Identity Management
- Law
- Mobile Security

- Network Security
- Physical Security and Critical Infrastructure
- Policy & Government
- Professional Development
- Research Revealed
- Security Awareness
- Social Networking
- Strategy & Architecture
- War Stories
- Wireless Security

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Tracks 2012

- **Call for Speaker Tracks**
  - Application Security
  - Cloud Security (1/2 track)
  - Data Security
  - Governance, Risk & Compliance
  - Hackers & Threats (2 tracks)
  - Law
  - Mobile Security (1/2 track)
  - Policy & Government
  - Professional Development (Monday 1/2 track)
  - Security Trends
  - Strategy & Architecture
  - Technology Infrastructure

- **Additional Tracks**
  - Cryptography
    - Academic track with paper submissions
  - Industry Experts
    - Invited speakers
  - Hot Topics (1/2 track)
    - Invited speakers closer to the Conference date to cover late breaking security issues
  - Sponsor Sessions
    - Case studies – reviewed with same criteria as other track sessions
  - Association Special Topics
    - New this year

Session Selection Process

- **First level review**
  - Mapped to tracks (potentially more than one)
  - Incomplete submissions, blatant commercials eliminated
- **Major review: Program Committee**
  - Each track has 2-3 Program Committee judges composed of experts in the field
  - Security professionals, government employees, attorneys, scientists, technology experts, researchers
- **Final review: Program Chairman**
  - Promotion of some sessions to Industry Experts
  - Eliminating duplicate selections

2012 Submission Totals

Track Name:	# of Submissions Sent to PC
Application Security	114
Cloud Security	100
Data Security	96
Governance, Risk & Compliance	113
Hackers & Threats	178
Law	26
Mobile Security	81
Policy & Government	66
Professional Development	27
Security Trends	62
Strategy & Architecture	174
Technology Infrastructure	163
Total	**1200**

Session Selection Criteria

- The relationship of the topic to the track
- The interest in the topic
- ***The long abstract***
- The technical merit of the session
- Best proposal compared to similar submissions
- Previous scores of the speaker, if available
  - New speakers welcome!

Session Formats

- Individual Speaker
- Co-presenters (2 speakers)
- Panel (3-4 panelists)
    - Moderator acts as facilitator; panelists do not use slides
    - *All panelists must be confirmed at time of submission*

- Session length
    - 50 minutes
    - 70 minutes – Panels, Advanced Demos

The Proposal

- Short Abstract (400 characters)
  - Used to market session to attendees; appears online and in print
- Long Abstract (2,500 characters)
  - Provide more detail on the session and show how the speaker will deliver on the learning objectives
  - ***This is the most important part of the submission***

- Session Learning Objectives (1000 characters)
  - Up to five concise performance objectives for your presentation
- Technical ratings
  - Advanced
  - Intermediate
  - General interest
- Video Submission (optional)
  - Great for first timers
  - Previous speakers who have improved their skills

Top Reasons for Rejection

- Incomplete submission

- Sales pitch

- Presentation is too basic

- Multiple submissions on the same topic

    - Be unique!
    - For popular topics you are competing with known experts

- Presenter title and/or experience

- Previous speaker ratings

- *Long abstract does not provide enough information about the session*

Increase the Odds

- Highly rated speaker from previous Conferences
- Panels – hotly debated issues; controversy
- Real world experience and knowledge
- Implementations that are different; challenge conventional thinking

- Review the 2012 program to see what was selected
- Submit a short video to demonstrate your speaking skills
- Spend time on the long abstract

Other Opportunities

- RSA Conference Europe 2012
  - Call for Speakers to open early April
- RSA Conference China 2012
  - Call for Speakers and exact dates TBD
  - Check RSA Conference website
- Peer2Peer Sessions

Other Opportunities: Peer2Peer

- Facilitate a session with 25 delegates
- Abstract should clearly indicate a discussion – not a presentation
- Good chance to build up good ratings with the Conference for the future

Behind the Scenes – the Program Committee Selection Process

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# How talks *are not* selected

No Shortcuts for Hard Work

- Follow the submission instructions
- Follow this session's guidance
  - Caveat: this is MY view, each track is different.
  - RSA Conference committee leaves the actual process up to the track judges

Flaming enthusiasm, backed by horse sense and persistence, is the quality that most frequently makes for success.

- Dale Carnegie

What do your peers want to attend?

- Judges think of their "Dream Track"

- Quality topics, speakers

- Solving hard problems, new discoveries or methods

- Interesting security issues

- Upcoming problems
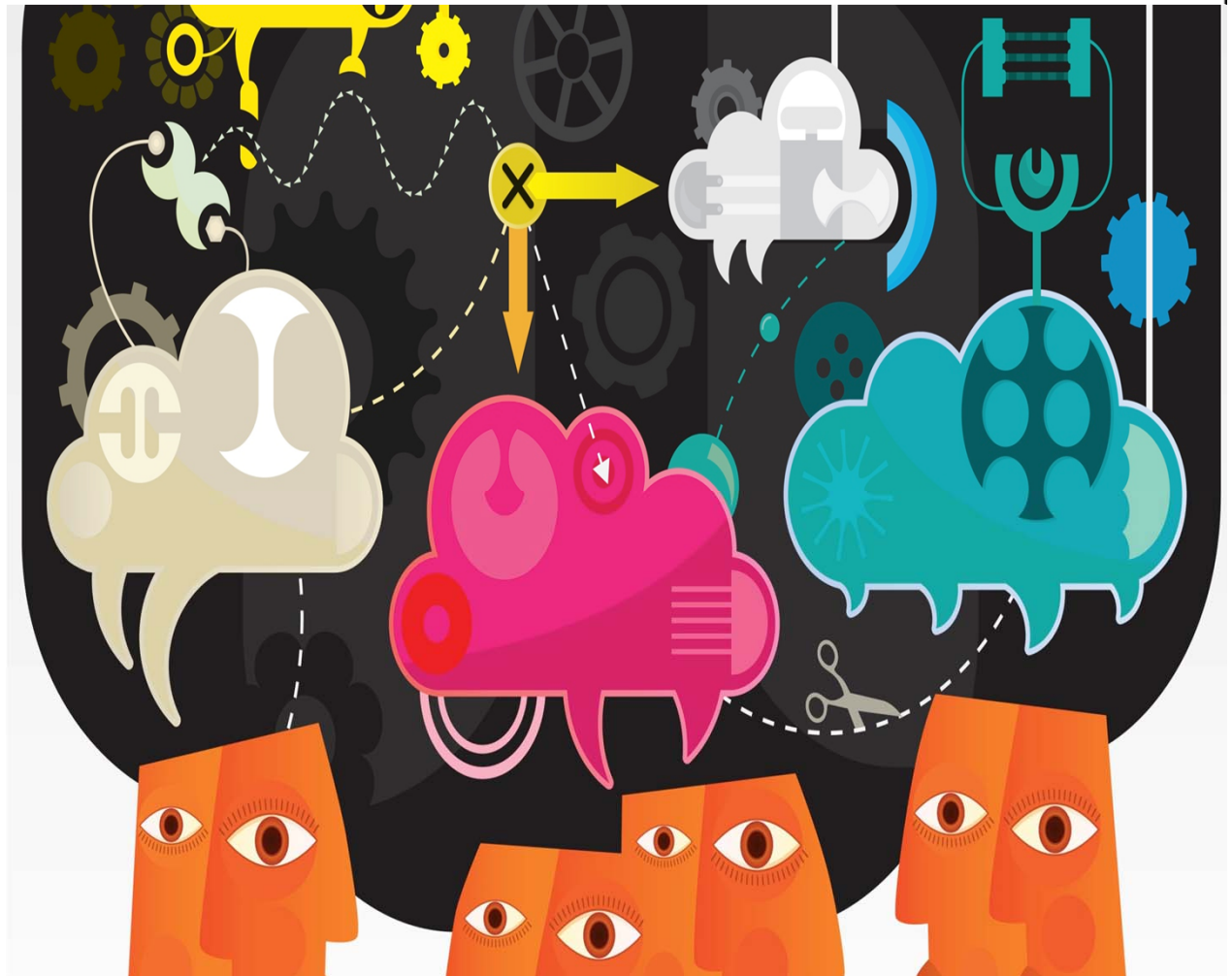
Getting Selected – Rejection Reasons

Top 3 rejection reasons
for Cloud Security track

1. Probable Sales pitch

2. Topic not technical
   enough

3. Topic Covered by
   Superior submission

How to Cloud Security Track worked

- First Cut: From 100 to 39

- Next Pass: The "better of the best" (21)
  - Pick best talks within hot themes
  - Go back to the dream track; "What would attendees want to see?"

- Final round: (7+3 alternates)
  - Closely re-evaluate each one's long abstract, speaker's expertise
  - How well do they articulate the story? Review any videos. Looking for talks with any "edge" over another.
  - We spent the most time in this round

Final Review – Program Chair

- Does our "Dream Track" cover what it should?

- Did we cover the important aspects of the track?

- Did we miss any cross-submissions from other tracks?

After You've Been Picked – Slides Review

- Does it match the description, abstract?
- Is it technical enough?
- Is it telling the story?

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Result: You giving a great talk to your peers!

The 7 Mortal Sins (and Wins) of Session Submission

....and then some

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Sin 1: Ignore the Long Abstract

You've got a great short abstract; it's punchy, it's provocative, and has a reference to the Matrix…why not just copy and paste it as the long abstract too?

- Judges look to the long abstract for depth…it's a tool to convince judges that you can deliver on what was promised in the short abstract.
- Include details about the session – dazzle judges with your grasp of the topic
- Talk about what the session will contain and your approach to presenting the material

Sin 2: Submit a sales pitch

You love your product; surely the audience would love to hear about it…right?

- No one wins when you integrate a product pitch into your session
- Feedback consistently shows that session attendees do not want to hear product pitches; they are looking for real insight that is going to help them do their jobs better
- Sessions that include product pitches score very badly -- Judges know this and will instantly reject a session that feels like a product pitch
- Don't use customer case study as sales vehicle
- Save pitches for your booth where they can collect leads!

Sin 3: Submit a superficial talk

"Introduction to information security," "Why hackers are bad," "Software security is important," "Overview of cloud security.".....

- The average RSA Conference has 9 years of experience in the IT Security field; they are beyond the basics.
- Instead of "Software security is important" how about "12 months into implementing a secure development lifecycle: the ups, the downs, and the naked truth about metrics"
- Also remember that there is a competitive field of submissions – how does yours stand out?

Sin 4: Be boring, bland, or unoriginal

Life is full of too much joy…my session needs to be by the book, predictable, and generally uninspiring.

- What did you experience at the sessions at RSA Conference 2012?

- The audience wants to hear from people that are excited about what they do and have something interesting to share

- Be creative, be unconventional, be thought provoking…creative abstracts make judges think that this person might bring something new and interesting to the security conversation

Sin 5: Submit a session based on pure speculation and no evidence/data

"Real World" implementations are for losers…I'll keep my session high-level, theoretical, and ethereal

- Attendees are looking for information that they can take back with them to their jobs
- Real-world data, war stories, and tactical discussions give attendees the type of information they need
- Consider releasing any data that you have gathered
- High-level sessions are good if they challenge conventional thinking

Sin 6: Submit a session that is completely inconsistent with your bio or experience

Just because I've spent my career in marketing and have no technical background doesn't mean I won't deliver a great and detailed talk on hacking the power grid.

- Judges look to the title and bio of a presenter to see if they can deliver what was promised in the abstract
- Titles like "Director of Product Marketing" or "Director of Sales" tend to inspire fear that the session may be too high-level and contain a product pitch
- If you are in sales or marketing, consider teaming with someone technical
- If an acquisition landed you with a marketing title, make your experience clear in your submission

Sin 6a: Submit little detail on your session except for your bio and experience

I have written 6 books on security and spoken at 12 security conferences this year – surely you don't need a lot of information about my session.

- You may have amazing credentials but judges want new material
- The title and abstract need to be compelling to attract delegates
- The long abstract is important to convince the judges that you are not going to "wing it"
- Your bio space is limited – make sure you relate your experience to the subject of your session

Sin 7: Submit a panel with people that never actually agreed to be on your panel

Panelists include: Henry Kissinger, Lance Armstrong, Janet Napolitano, Bill Clinton, the director of "Swordfish," etc.

- Incomplete panels or panels that have missing bios are rejected
- Confirm participation by panelists before including them in your submission
- Check with panelists early so that they have time to lock in their schedules
- If your panel is accepted, communicate with your panelists regularly

Bonus Sin: Delegate your submission to your marketing organization/ agency

I don't have time to submit and it's their job…and they're so good at it!

- Marketing folks are great at writing but not technical detail
- Only you can write the long abstract – we need confidence that the session will contain the technical content that delegates need
- Marketing has the great ability to turn customer experiences into references – not lessons learned
- You need to work with marketing or your agency!
  - They want your help!

Ultimate Mortal Sin: Don't submit

Forget it; only the gurus get accepted. The thing is rigged. Besides, I'm fundamentally against sharing knowledge – I've never donated to Wikipedia.

- 2012 has a large number of first time speakers
- The selection process is purely merit-based -- if you've done something interesting in security, you should submit
- Submissions come from every level in the organization: engineers, QA. auditors, architects, administrators, managers, CSOs, CIOs, CEOs, …
- This is how our industry grows!
- First time speakers have priority access to professional coaching – take advantage of the opportunity to grow!!!

How to Apply What You Learned Today

- Review the week
  - What sessions were remarkable?
  - Why did you choose to attend certain sessions?
- Questions to ask
  - In the next six months what experiences can you share with RSA Conference delegates?
  - Is there someone you would like to have as a co-speaker?
- Keep the program guide for reference
- Join our mailing list for notifications
  www.rsaconference.com
- More questions – speakers@rsaconference.com

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