Will CIOs abandon the Internet?

Professor David Farber, considered by many as the grandfather of the Internet, recently delivered a talk in Singapore. He tells Tissie Adhistia that CIOs may not have a choice when it comes to use of the Internet.

As the Internet poses many annoyances and threats, CIOs may rebel against using it. What is your view?

I think they don’t have a choice when it comes to the use of the Internet. It is part of the business fabric. It’s like your telephone, it may annoy you but you can’t get rid of it because you’ll be out of business. So, what CIOs should be doing is putting pressure on vendors to implement the best security measures. Essentially holding their noses to the grindstone, and not agreeing to any exemptions. It is not an easy problem.

It’s all the cost of doing business. It’s a trade-off and companies could actually say they can live with the problems because the benefits are enormous. So I don’t believe that people would turn away from the Internet, as the advantages would balance off the annoyance and threats.

How important is an Internet security standard and how do you see its progress?

Yes it is important. In the long term, a security standard is mostly going to be motivated by insurance companies. In most companies, even if they don’t have direct cyber insurance, they have insurance that covers a lot of their operations. And those insurance companies will start taking into account the risks that will be reflected in their premiums.

Also in the US, there are rules that require businesses to certify that their financial data is properly protected. If they lie about it, certainly stockholders will not be pleased. So there are a lot of practices that make people pay attention to Internet security. Again, it’s a trade-off. I think people will be willing to spend a reasonable amount of money on security to meet the standard.

The Internet is dominated by a few major players. What is the implication given that it is supposed to be an open platform?

I think it is open. I use myself four different browsers and I constantly trade them. Each has its advantages. I would use them for different purposes depending on the advantages. For example, Google is good for some things but terrible for others. People use the whole set of these browsers or search engines, and more will come out. Domination doesn’t last long if they don’t innovate. The Microsoft browser has survived only because it has sort of welded into the environment so it’s hard to get rid of.

What is the future of the Internet with the claims of Internet-enabled devices?

The Internet will be everywhere and it’s progressively more difficult to get away from. The Internet gives access to the world, so nations that tend to limit that will suddenly find themselves insulated from the rest of the world, and that can have a dangerous impact right now. So I think it’s going to be more difficult for people to remain insulated. In the long run, it will cause grief to a lot of businesses but also a lot of happiness.

What is the critical thing CIOs must bear in mind when keeping up with the Internet?

I think they have to understand what’s real and what’s not from what they’re being told, because companies often stretch the truth. CIOs should ask hard questions and constantly demand hard answers, and use it as they go. If they’re not technically competent themselves to ask questions, they will need to have staff who are. CIOs also have to answer to CEOs on the business process, that it is always secure. As CEOs are the ones accountable for the security of the business, CIOs who cannot give that assurance won’t be CIOs for very long.