

# Cyber warriors' new weapon

## Dynetics figures out how warding off attacks can be faster and cheaper

By Kimberly Ballard

**W**alking across the office parking lot to your office building, you see on the sidewalk that someone dropped his or her thumb-drive. You innocently

pick it up and pop it into the front of your machine to see whether anything on it tells you to whom it belongs. Chances are, however, that you just unknowingly planted a virus on your system, waiting dor-

mant for activation by any number of mundane keystrokes. Driving through parking lots and casually dropping virus-ridden thumb-drives in pedestrian walkways is just one of the many examples of today's deliberate cyber-scramming tactics used to plant viruses and hack into highly secure information systems. If you work for the federal government, the Department of Defense, missile defense, or as a contractor for them, you are a prime target.

Bombarded daily with thousands of evolving cyber attacks that challenge anti-virus software and standard information assurance (IA) controls like password protection, government systems are subject to an almost non-stop struggle to stay in compliance with the Department of Defense Information Assurance Certification and Accreditation Process (DIACAP). DIACAP is the DoD's standard for maintaining IA compliance throughout a system's lifecycle. Today, because of the thumb-drive fraud, external USB ports are non-existent on any DoD or government installation computers.

Homeland Security's effort to respond with increasingly more stringent IA security compliance standards presented logistics prob-



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DAVE DIETER

**Dynetics cyber security specialists model and scan customer networks and systems, with the ultimate goal of maintaining compliance with security regulations. New Dynetics software tools automate the process for accomplishing this goal, thereby saving organizations 70 percent or more of current costs. Foreground is Shawnessy Scott, information assurance analyst, rear center is Bobby Rogers, senior information assurance analyst and right is Andrew Chiles, information assurance analyst**

lems. "Maintaining compliance has been a rigorous and completely manual process that presented a challenge for Information Assurance Analysts (IAA)," says Dr. Ted Mueller, director for Ground-based Midcourse Defense-Certification Accreditation at the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) in Huntsville. "We had no checks and balances or means for cross-referencing voluminous amounts of data." In other

words, there was no commonly formatted, authoritative database to drive collected data through a workflow process to accomplish DIACAP compliance accurately and completely.

### **AUTOMATED OPPORTUNITY**

As a third party tester for defense industry compliance, Dynetics saw a

great need and an opportunity to develop an automated system that helps IAAs better manage the security compliance process. Tom Gates, Dynetics product manager, says the company's AssuredCompliance suite answers this call.

"Dynetics' AssuredCompliance is unique and the first product of its kind on the market," Gates says. "We offer more than cyber security solutions. We offer a cost efficient and

time saving method for assuring it.

"This is not a glamorous product, but it is a lot like maintenance on your car," Gates says. "Taking the car in for an oil change is inconvenient, time-consuming, and a mundane task. Yet, if you do not take the time to change the oil, you will soon be facing an automotive disaster. If IA compliance is not maintained, our lifestyles and military defenses are vulnerable to attack, and the result of that is disastrous."

As any individual or network IT professional running McAfee Virus Security software knows, it updates several times a day in the background of your computer to stay on top of ongoing attempts to break in. These ever-changing scans mean compliance standards may change as well, so an IAA's job is relentless. "(Cybercrime) attacks have progressed from initial curiosity probes to well-funded and well-organized operations for political, military, economic, and technical espionage," says Jeff Green, senior vice president of McAfee Avert Labs.

On June 15, Deputy Secretary of Defense William J. Lynn confirmed the growing severity of the cyber threat in a speech delivered at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "We know that foreign governments are developing offensive cyber-capabilities and that more than 100 foreign intelligence organizations are trying to hack into U.S. networks." He further confirmed the vulnerability of the government's estimated 15,000 networks, which connect 7 million computers, IT devices, and servers. "Indeed, our 21st century military simply cannot function without them."

"If XYZ Company has a new contract with the MDA and it needs to hook into the MDA's accredited network, it too must independently meet the same compliance standards outlined by DIACAP," says Greg

Jackson, senior cyber security information assurance analyst for Dynetics. "Not only are IAAs maintaining their own compliance, but those incoming systems must also meet the requirements. Something as simple as the MDA running the Vista operational system while XYZ is running XP, can lead to hundreds of hours of configuration and analysis to bring them into compliance."

"When you consider that just the U.S. Army alone has over 3,000 systems requiring thousands of man-hours per system at a conservative cost of \$100 an hour, automating these processes saves hundreds of millions of dollars," Jackson says. Using Dynetics' AssuredCompliance solutions, Gates says a process that used to take 18 months, can now take 6 weeks. "AssuredCompliance cuts compliance and assurance costs by 70 percent or more," says Gates.

## SPREADSHEET ELIMINATED

Composed of three components – AssuredCompliance Interrogator, Investigator, and the Knowledge Manager – the suite of products captures data from three main components of the compliance process. Investigator is a technical tool that scans a system's local computers and network to compile its findings into a common format for quick analysis. It provides reports and catalogues information into a database for later access.

AssuredCompliance Interrogator uses an intuitive question-and-answer Web application to conduct the IDO interview component of the compliance process. Although there is a human factor still necessary, Interrogator makes the manual spreadsheet method obsolete, and feeds the information into the comprehensive database. All

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the inputs are then integrated into the documentation component called the Knowledge Manager, where it uses relational references to manage end-to-end DIACAP compliance and analysis.

“Dynamics AssuredCompliance is a configurable product, which means we work together with our customers to make the product meet unique needs,” Gates says. “That is the advantage of using industry-standard technologies to offer a lot of flexibility.”

MDA’s Dr. Mueller is one of these customer-partners. MDA even has its own name for the product. “In the long term, we expect to see the Information Assurance Knowledge Base become a depository for everything we do,” Mueller says. “We hope to grow it into an official storehouse - a relational government database we will continue to mature over time. It works well with the electronic signa-

ture tools in Adobe, too.”

The Internet and system networks offer many opportunities for bad guys to continue Cyber Wars, says Jackson. “There are three areas of vulnerability - the integrity of the data; the confidentiality of the data, which simply means there is limited access to it by way of passwords or other security methods; and the actual availability of the data. All these areas are covered under IA compliance, and our products pull it all together.”

Jackson’s division at Dynamics is a lawful version of Robert Redford’s somewhat shady team in the 1992 movie Sneakers. Martin Brice and his tiger team are hired to break into a secure computer system, just to see if they can. “There is no better way to test compliance,” Jackson says, “than to deliberately see if you can get through.” ■

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