

The 2011 San Francisco ISACA Chapter's Fall Conference

A Personal Point of View

By Douglas Feil CISA, CISM, CFE

The San Francisco ISACA Chapter's Fall Conference has become the premier education event for Information Systems Audit, Security and Governance professionals in Northern California. This year's 11th Annual Fall Conference, "Back to Business", was again hosted at the beautiful Hotel Nikko in downtown San Francisco. As always, the Nikko was most gracious and welcoming to help the chapter by offering our members a quality venue at an affordable price, in the exciting City By the Bay.

This year as a member of the conference committee, I participated in many of the planning conference calls which started in January. This allowed me to see the level of detail required with the conference project and the new challenges that arise as the conference planning blueprint takes shape. It is impressive to see the number and importance of the decisions to be made by the conference co-chairs to make the event as seamless as possible. Other volunteer's input was also very important in the decision process. All of these planning activities were formalized and available on a shared web-site for the committee volunteers. My sincere appreciation to the conference/committee chairs and dedicated volunteers for their work to achieve all the conferences deliverables on target.

Again, I was fortunate enough to be a Track Lead, this time for the Core Competencies Track. The bad news - I was responsible for the same room for the entire conference. The good news - this is by far the best meeting room in the Hotel Nikko. After we entered the meeting room, we all knew why it was named "BayView". Meanwhile, the Nikko meeting staff was superb and they cleaned our room between the sessions, stocked all the necessities and stayed in touch with me frequently - to ensure all was satisfactory, very attentive to our needs.

As a conference attendee the professional networking opportunities were great. In my case, many of these professional relationships have turned into great personal friendships. We have many talented and enterprising individuals in our SF chapter, as I discover at each conference and at our monthly luncheon sessions, both of which are excellent for networking. My Track Lead status allowed me to personally meet with each session speaker and first-hand observe the various levels of audience participation. I was quite impressed with the qualifications and professional speakers we had for the Core Competencies track. Our session attendees were from all levels of the profession, which was impressive since this track was billed to address the needs of beginners in the profession. Our session audiences were active in discussion and all were positive in their professional curiosity. Personally, I came away with many new concepts, insights, and reference sources from each session – and some new friends.

Special Conference Events

Our Keynote Address by Bruce W. McConnell, Senior Counselor and Director, Cyber+Strategy, National Protection and Programs Directorate (NPPD), U.S. Department of Homeland Security - "How Do We Secure Cyberspace: The DHS Perspective" was timely and insightful as any conference opening address.

For me the Monday lunch was plentiful and included a salad, main entrée and a sweet dessert. My fellow attendees at the table were quite enthusiastic about their upcoming sessions and the Keynote Speaker's opening address. For our lunch presentation we had Dave Cullinane, CISO & VP, eBay Global Fraud, Risk & Security this was a fact-filled presentation on the state of information security, or insecurity.

On Monday evening we had the conference Sponsor's Reception and Networking Event. The hosted snack and refreshments (1st class) were a nice touch after our first day jitters. This was an ideal opportunity to meet our Sponsors up-close and discuss their products and services oriented to our profession – each exhibitor had current reference materials and nice "take-aways" too. I enjoyed this opportunity to learn first-hand about the many new offerings and the variety of services available from our local Sponsors. In addition, there was a continuous raffle during the evening with a variety of most excellent gifts. I really appreciated this extra time for networking with my fellow professionals, sponsors and the many conference committee volunteers.

Tuesday was the Sponsor and Exhibitor Luncheon, another great opportunity to meet with our twenty-six loyal sponsors/exhibitors and the bountiful buffet they had provided for us with a great selection of salads, vegetables and premium sandwich fix'ins. There was plenty for seconds. This was also a great networking event since we did not start again until 2PM. A high-light of this luncheon is the grand gift raffle from the sponsors and our chapter. My fortune with raffles is quite lame, but the odds were good. This was my lucky-time and my gift was Bose QuietComfort 15 Acoustic Noise Cancelling headphones, compliments of EMC/RSA. Thank you so much dear Sponsor, it seems my airline seat always attracts the small children on the long-distance flights.

For the Wednesday luncheon we had another fine full-course meal that was professionally served by the Nikko staff in the Ballroom. Our luncheon speaker was Kenneth DeJarnette – Principal Deloitte on the topic of "The Future of Security – Evolve or Die". It was a very lively session with some good audience interaction, and many future thoughts for our profession.

During the luncheon the Conference Committee Co-chairs honored the many hard-working conference volunteers and recognized our Chapter Officers and past Chapter Presidents in attendance. This was another well-planned and attended event for the last day of our conference. Each of our conference chairs/co-chairs devoted hours of their personal time to make this a successful conference, be sure to give them your personal "Thank You" for this success for our chapter, and an education event all chapter members should attend.

Not much time for good-byes to my new friends after the last lunch presentation. My final session was ready to start and I worked at the top. When I arrive, the last of the audience is getting seated (almost a

full-house) and our speaker is ready for my introduction. Another exciting session and we have reached the end of the track. Our Core Competencies Track has covered an excellent selection of topics and speakers for this track. I am proud of our speaker committee and the high-caliber speakers and session topics they selected for us – nice job.

Some comments from conference attendees.

Charles Cresson Wood - Technology Risk Management Consultant, Mendocino, CA.

1. The program committee was able to draw speakers from far away, such as the guy from Washington, D.C. representing DHS.
2. A number of famous speakers were there like Dave Cullinane, and that really speaks to how the conference has come to be seen as a significant event, worthy of their time.
3. The one statistic that really stands out for me was Dave Cullinane's remark that each day some 72,000 new pieces of malware are released onto the Internet. No wonder we are having such a difficult time.
4. More so than in prior years, I found the discussion after the presentations to be interesting and useful. I appreciated that the speakers were leaving more time for discussion.
5. The increased number of attendees (I believe it got up to 300) indicated that this event is widely seen as a good value for money.

I have known Charles for a few decades and he has been an ardent supporter of our SF Chapter as a member and leading-edge technology speaker since the start of our chapter. He is the author of numerous books and articles which cover the many key areas of the IS Security and Audit professions. I always appreciate his opinion.

Another senior chapter member who has attended prior Fall conferences, had these observations:

Topic - Sessions on cloud computing were timely and most were informative.

Speakers - Most of the track speakers were knowledgeable and had hands-on cloud computing experience, such as the session speakers from Amazon.

Venue - Very nice and the Hotel Nikko was able to accommodate the large number of attendees without it feeling crowded.

Some of my thoughts and observations:

For the Core Competencies Track: very informative for every session, high caliber and practiced speakers were selected, very positive audience participation, attendees from all generations of our professional association. Planning and coordination for this Track were flawless – kudos.

I spoke with many of the conference participants in the elevators, during lunch and at the networking breaks and found they all enjoyed the conference sessions and the Hotel Nikko accommodations. This was further evident in the positive conference comments I heard at the daily morning buffet, during the luncheons, and the afternoon break sessions.

I like the attendee interaction during the sessions. Most speakers encourage the presentation break and appreciate topical questions, and many believe it stimulates audience participation and often offers new topic insights.

The conference “Green-Theme” started this year and was well received by all. Always something new from our conference committee for our members each year, keep going.

Amazing the number of folks that attended for the CEUs – me too, great value and you get to take in many of the current and future trends in our professions. I did notice that attendance at the sessions had very few drop-outs, and many even stayed to hear the speakers discuss more. Overall, for whatever reason you attended, this year’s conference was again “quality education at an affordable price”.

Business casual: wow this was a broad range. A majority of the professionals that I know that have become managers or directors, are well-heeled and dress for success. Look to anyone in a C position and note how they professionally present themselves. You never know, your future boss could be in the audience – first impressions. I noted that our conference chairs must be “C” folks.

Texting during sessions – please leave electronics off, it’s more than just the e-outs, if your audience has their head bent-over it’s not a good sign of attention. Please respect our session speakers and sponsor speakers at lunch presentations – a small price for the donation of their time and presentation effort. Reason we have breaks during sessions to stay up with the virtual office.

Out of a chapter membership of over 900, it was a core of fifty or so, fellow professionals that pulled-off another first class fall conference. Their names may be familiar, but many of their efforts are seldom noticed. I was fortunate enough to see these players in action both in person and in the background during the conference calls. Yep, they have full-time jobs and many have families too. Please “tip your hat” to these dedicated volunteers for a most excellent 2011 Fall Conference and their commitment to continually succeed exceptionally - for the benefit of our San Francisco ISACA Chapter membership.

This may be my last fall conference article, but I did say that before. I looked into to my past conference articles and they go back to 2006, or was it 2005? Always the same theme for me in each article – please Congratulate our SF Chapter’s dedicated Fall Conference Committee Volunteers. Also, consider being a conference committee volunteer in 2012, the chapter needs your talent and the friendships you make are forever. I look forward to seeing you at the SF Chapter’s 2012 Fall Conference.