

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

RSac – Security Vomit

I am certain that RSA (the cybersecurity company) is happy to be increasingly disassociated with RSac (the RSA Conference – pronounced R sack? – I will use RSac to clarify the Sac part), which is now a separate entity. The conference is moving further and further away from technical value and more and more toward the marketplace it really is. But having said that, this article is titled based on the breakfast fare provided to attendees.

For my breakfast I had the vegetarian bagel with eggs and vegetables and the vegan version of yogurt (quinoa), a banana, and water. The water and banana were fine. And the vegan version of yogurt was edible. But the version of eggs with vegetable honestly looked like vomit – with its chunks of vegetable matter in a substance that had no semblance to an actual egg ground up and gooey. It was truly disgusting.

But somehow, breakfast was symbolic of the conference itself in a lot of ways. Most of the things I saw were regurgitation of the same old same old with this year's keyword (AI) added, sometimes even in a place that made sense, but not usually.

AI AI AI AI AI (pronounced eye eye eye eye eye)

The big splash of AI on the market did not escape the RSac where we heard and saw company after company touting its pre-existing security solution now also protecting AI, but not actually the AI (eye eye sir), but rather the infrastructure IT components that the AI runs on.

Agentic AI, the new term for a software agent – software in a computer – that uses AI – except not really what we were calling AI last year, means installing endpoint software that is less reliable than the old non AI version in all your systems, so when it hallucinates (not really any such thing - it's an anthropomorphism) – or in other words gives wrong answers – we can laugh it off as whatever.

All of which is to say, it's a “breakthrough in marketing technology”.

There were actually a few companies in there using learning mechanisms associated with modern AI (statistics used in a methodology that is less well studied than real statistics) to useful ends, but finding them among the flotsam and jetsam is no easy task.

If you think this conference was more painful than a poke in the AI, you are right.

Keynotes

I generally ignore the keynotes at the RSac because they usually bring out more about the ignorance and egos of the speakers than light to the darkness. However, there were two opposites that I think are worthy of note.

- **Kristi Noem**, representing the worst of the worst in government for cybersecurity, who should have been apologizing for the complete stupidity of the top folks in government surrounding operations security, was there because at the RSac we more or less have to expect that if money or power wants to talk, the RSac will abide.

- **Magic Johnson**, a very successful business person and former NBA star, who knows almost nothing about the technology aspects of security, but who was both entertaining and instructive when it comes to an executive perspective. Despite the relative lack of content regarding cybersecurity, the points he made were good ones, his delivery was joyous and fun, his personality (which seems wonderful) came through, and he explained things in simple terms necessary for understanding by anyone.

However, to call these keynotes when there are dozens of them seems like what it is. They are not keynotes at all, but rather famous people and luminaries (with some exceptions) who are there to entertain and draw participants. And of course that is what they do – sell tickets. And since the RSac is in the business of selling tickets and advertising space, that's just fine. But don't imagine it is really anything but the marketplace it is.

There are always a few bright spots

None of the international booths reported that anyone was taken into custody at the US border on the way into the country. At least one participant from Germany did not make it, but the individual I talked to about it had no information on how or why they didn't get there.

The crowds, as I clocked it, were less dense than in many past years, and I am aware of quite a few travelers who did not make it this year for various reasons. That is a bright spot for me because the noise levels were lower and so far I haven't picked up any of the typical airborne diseases I usually get spending a dozen hours in heavy crowds in closed spaces. On the other hand, I missed some of my friends who didn't make it this year.

Another bright spot was the extent to which the whole event has metastasized into the surrounding areas. For at least a few blocks, it was all RSac all the time, and I ended up sitting down and chatting with some good connections in quieter places with better seating outside of the venue than I ever find inside it.

Officiousness

Far away and long ago, the RSA was a place you could go and meet folks and talk to them. But as bypassing the system became a game many played and bragged about (myself included), the security lock-downs became more extreme. The key is always balance between being a good host and providing appropriate protections. And there are always people who are too officious.

Most of the staff is hired in for the event and told what to do, and they try to follow instructions while being nice. But then you have some bosses who insist on stupidity because, I presume, they think it counters chaos. And as a people we are more cowed than we used to be, so we don't fight against such things like we once would have. The reasonable person principle is with us no more.

So it is not surprising that meals that were getting cold and sitting there in controlled spaces with the people there to eat them, as staff members were being commanded to not let people eat until the clock struck the exact minute of start of service. And that when the supervisor was there, the workers were stiff and formal, while they were nice and friendly when the supervisors were away. Security theater I think it's called. I prefer niceness.

Conclusions

The RSac is everything we have come to expect out of years of security conference training.