

*Highlighting the career of outstanding ISSA members...*

## Louis Gamon

### 2007 ISSA Security Professional of the Year

For the east side of the Atlantic, Louis Gamon has been the face of ISSA for years, a tireless proponent for the organization and facilitator of chapter development. Instrumental in starting up the UK chapter and helping it grow to currently being the second largest across the globe, Gamon has assisted in the forming of chapters throughout Europe as ISSA EMEA Regional Director, a position now taken up by Bart Moerman and the newly formed Chapter Presidents Advisory Council.

Like Robin Wheeler, ISSA Honor Roll 2007, Gamon got started in information security while working at Digital Equipment Corporation following several high-profile hacking incidents, taking on the role of UK InfoSec manager and ultimately EMEA InfoSec manager as well. There was a corporate initiative at the time that all members of the InfoSec team should be CISSP certified. "I was probably the first CISSP certified in the UK," says Gamon, "and one of four in Europe."

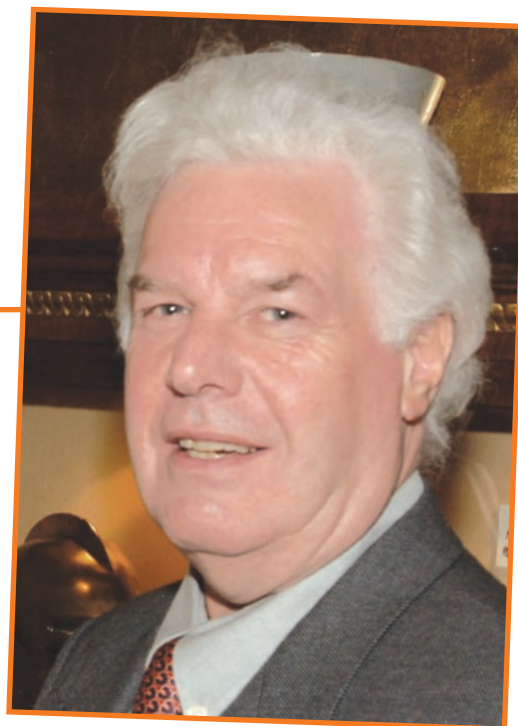
#### Chapter development

In 2003 Gamon was approached by colleague (another ex-Deccie) and ISSA international vice president Candy Alexander to get an ISSA chapter going in the UK. Though he had not heard of ISSA at the time, he soon realized the organization filled a gap in the profession – where information security professionals could gather face-to-face, learn from each other's experiences, successes and failures, and take advantage of training opportunities. "Candy had tried a number of times," Gamon recalled. "It was a worthwhile endeavor, and I was determined to carry it forward." And that he did.

"The UK had a good share of InfoSec people, and the CISSP population was growing rapidly," says Gamon. "But this population of professionals lacked face-to-face meetings, and they needed training opportunities." The chapter was launched to coincide with the InfoSecurity Europe event where they had a booth, and have had each year since. Once established the chapter focused mainly on the London area, where most folks were, which was fine until members in outlying regions started falling away due to travel constraints. "As we grew we had to get programs out to other areas," he said. "So over the past 12 months we have held regional meetings in three different locations, enabling us to reach out to quite a few more people. This got us more members, and we are now the second largest chapter in the association! You'll have to forgive me for blowing our horn!" The UK chapter currently holds four quarterly chapter meetings in London, four security training days, and three regional events annually and has been awarded "ISSA Chapter of the Year" for 2005 and 2006.

#### Keep it topical, keep it relevant

The key to growing the chapter and maintaining the membership is flexibility and relevance. Developing interesting and worthwhile meetings and events is by no means easy. Planning for events often begins a year or at least many months prior, often locking in speakers and topics well in advance of the event. But what happens when something new comes on the scene? Can you change plans? "We are not adverse to changing content fairly late in the process to en-



sure topical, relevant subjects," Gamon remarked. "About a year ago we were planning a security day with a particular theme, when all of a sudden people were saying the payment card industry standard was very hot, very topical. So we switched it over with about four weeks to go. To keep your membership, you've got to keep the meetings and events topical. Listen to what your people want to hear about. This makes people interested and want to come along to the meetings."

#### The greater EMEA region

ISSA membership outside of the U.S. is roughly 18% today. While Gamon was establishing the UK chapter, the percentage was much less. "Outside of the U.S. it was difficult to engage with a lot of countries. Candy again approached me to lead the EMEA effort, to talk with folks in countries interested in getting a chapter off the ground. I could use the experience I gained getting the UK chapter up and running." He took on the role of ISSA Regional Director EMEA in 2003, using his expertise in support of existing chapters in Belgium, Ireland, and Switzerland and assisting in the establishing of chapters in France, Italy, Spain, Holland, Romania, Poland, and the Nordics.

## European perspective

“I was quite pleased at the recent international board election results: John Walker – England, Owen O’Conner – Ireland, and Stefano Zanero – Italy. Europe is so diverse. Different languages, different cultures, different way of doing things. We are not North America.

“When I was regional director, we held annual meetings to bring together as many European chapter presidents as possible – we got the international board to come over – hosted here in London. We’d go through potential issues, for example, what’s holding things back over here. When I set up the chapter here in the UK, as an example, it was easy: no restrictions, no laws, no aggravations. You set up a chapter in France or Italy or Spain and you have to go through mountains of due legal process just to set up a non-profit organization. It can get daunting. It’ll cost you between \$700 and \$1000 just

to go through the legal process of getting your bylaws set up. Those are the sort of issues that are difficult for international to grasp because it’s easy over in the States. It’s a bit more complicated in the majority of countries over here.”

Louis Gamon has stepped down from some of the more high-profile operations of the association but still maintains a leadership role in the UK chapter as Director of Administration. He understands the crucial role ISSA plays in the information security profession, providing an arena for professional development and camaraderie: “ISSA is a focal point for people to gravitate for education and networking. You’ll know somebody with an issue, a problem or an experience, and a solution.”

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