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*What it takes
to become a*
**chief information
security officer
(CISO)**

What it takes to become a chief information security officer (CISO)

A CISO typically has a technical information security or IT risk background, but the path that leads to the role can vary greatly. Here's how one CISO landed his first job in the position.

BY BOB VIOLINO

JEFF FOLTZ DID NOT set out to be an information security professional. He arrived at his current role as CISO at Fidelity National Financial by making the most of a series of opportunities and constantly building his skillset. His degree in psychology and philosophy would also

prove more useful in his CISO job than one might think.

After graduating from Kent State College in 1994, Foltz found himself gravitating toward technology. He began his career in the IT department of a graphic arts and supply company. There he provided technical support, wrote reports and performed systems administration for computing, networking and telecom systems.

“It was a one-stop shop that forced me to multi-task and quickly learn to adapt to challenges. I also needed to be able to speak technically with peers and translate that to customer-friendly messages that could be easily understood,” Foltz says.

At that time, there was little to no “information security” as a discipline because there wasn’t much of a threat landscape. “Connectivity to the internet was just dawning with systems like CompuServ, AOL and dial-up connectivity,” Foltz says. “Viruses were limited in nature.”

In 1996 he accepted a position at a

local bank, starting out as a field service LAN administrator whose main responsibility was to support the WAN and branch systems. The bank allowed him to pursue certifications in a variety of vendor platforms to stay current with the evolving technological aspects of business and commerce.

“I enjoy learning and trying to be a little bit better each day by reaching outside my current comfort zone,” Foltz says. “I learned in college the value of thought and action, and since that time have always followed the philosophy that ‘opportunities present themselves to those who are prepared.’ And as a second-generation Eagle Scout, that motto has served me well in life and as a CISO.”

Over time, the bank purchased other banks and became FirstMerit Bank. During his tenure there, which lasted until 2013, Foltz held a number of positions and responsibilities, eventually becoming the CISO.

“I was fortunate to work for a company that allowed me to build and

develop IT skills concurrently,” Foltz says. “I was the administrator for diverse systems such as firewalls, databases, web sites and development. I learned through trial and error the interworking of how each system connected and the strengths and weaknesses of each system.”

As a result, he became a sort of “Renaissance IT man” who was knowledgeable about multiple operating systems, languages, syntaxes and programs.

“I was able to build the platforms, configure and harden the system, write and compile the code, and ensure secure transport and delivery of the

various systems I handled,” Foltz says. “This ability provided me opportunities early on to present to the board of directors and executives for new initiatives, and it allowed me invaluable networking opportunities with industry leaders and financial executives at the company.”

Foltz always felt each of these opportunities was a bit outside of his reach and comfort zone. “But I resolved myself to take the opportunity and work at it until I felt that I was successful,” he says.

Around 2004, the information security manager at the bank retired and Foltz was awarded the position. During

this time, he focused his career development on information security and business continuity/disaster recovery.

“I immersed myself in all manner of training, both on the IT side and from a management/leadership perspective,” Foltz says. He studied and attended seminars by business leaders, and in 2007 received CISSP certification. He was promoted to senior vice president and CISO, and he worked with others to build out the information security program at FirstMerit.

“During my time as the CISO, the landscape of IT and security was quickly evolving and morphing into what we know today,” Foltz says. “The threat landscape went from the very loud yet relatively benign ‘I love you’ virus attacks and being sure your AV definitions were up-to-date, to the stealthy Zeus variants of organized crime and SCADA-type nation-state sponsored attacks.”

In 2013, Foltz decided he was ready for the next step in his career as an information security professional, and

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he accepted a CISO position at Fidelity National Financial (FNF). “FNF has been an amazing opportunity, where I continue to apply the skills and training

that I have learned over 20-plus years,” Foltz says. The company “provides unique opportunity to a CISO, due to the diversified portfolio of businesses

under its umbrella of companies,” he says.

While technical acumen is still necessary in his current role, it is diminished in importance and replaced with the need to provide strong vision and leadership on multiple fronts.

“I know it is cliché to state that a successful CISO must possess good written and verbal skills, but that is absolutely the case in order to be effective and advance your career to the next level,” Foltz says. “As CISOs, we must be enablers to the business and also promote the value proposition that we offer — both in written format and through dialog and action. In an always-on, connected global network of incoming intel and threats, CISOs must determine quickly how to assess these items, and prioritize and balance actions against the business goals, while doing so safely and securely.”

Foltz says his goal is to help safeguard and protect information in whatever form or capacity. “When I speak at engagements, I like to evangelize not

CAREER PROFILE

Chief information security officer

Roles	Vice president, information security manager, CSO, director of IT security
Minimum education	Bachelors degree
Relevant areas of study	Information technology, business, psychology, communications
Skills/certifications	Technology skills vary depending upon the role’s scope and influence and might include network engineering/architect, operating systems, internet, mobile devices and applications, data center systems, etc.
Potential employers	Organizations of all sizes and in all industries
Salary	CISO total compensation can range from \$250,000 to well over \$1 million, dependent upon the size of the team, reporting structure and the overall scope of influence, according to Alta Associates, a leading executive search firm specializing in cyber security.

only the corporate side of information security, but also the personal aspects of how to keep one's individual information safe and secure," he says.

Today's CISOs "have to blend a variety of skills — technical, social, psychological, business — that foster cooperation and alignment, because as CISOs we have achieved a necessary and crucial place at the table of executive management to participate in company strategy and management," Foltz says.

Foltz's path to becoming a CISO is not that unusual. Typically, a CISO has



a technical information security or IT risk background, but the path that leads to that role varies greatly, says Joyce Brocaglia, CEO of Alta Associates, a

leading executive search firm specializing in cyber security.

"There are prominent CISOs that present to the board, lead large teams, and are evangelists for their company and are no longer hands on," Brocaglia says. "For smaller organizations, many CISOs remain hands-on and are still bogged down in the weeds of technology. It truly depends on the maturity of the department, the culture of the organization and the value they place on information security." ■