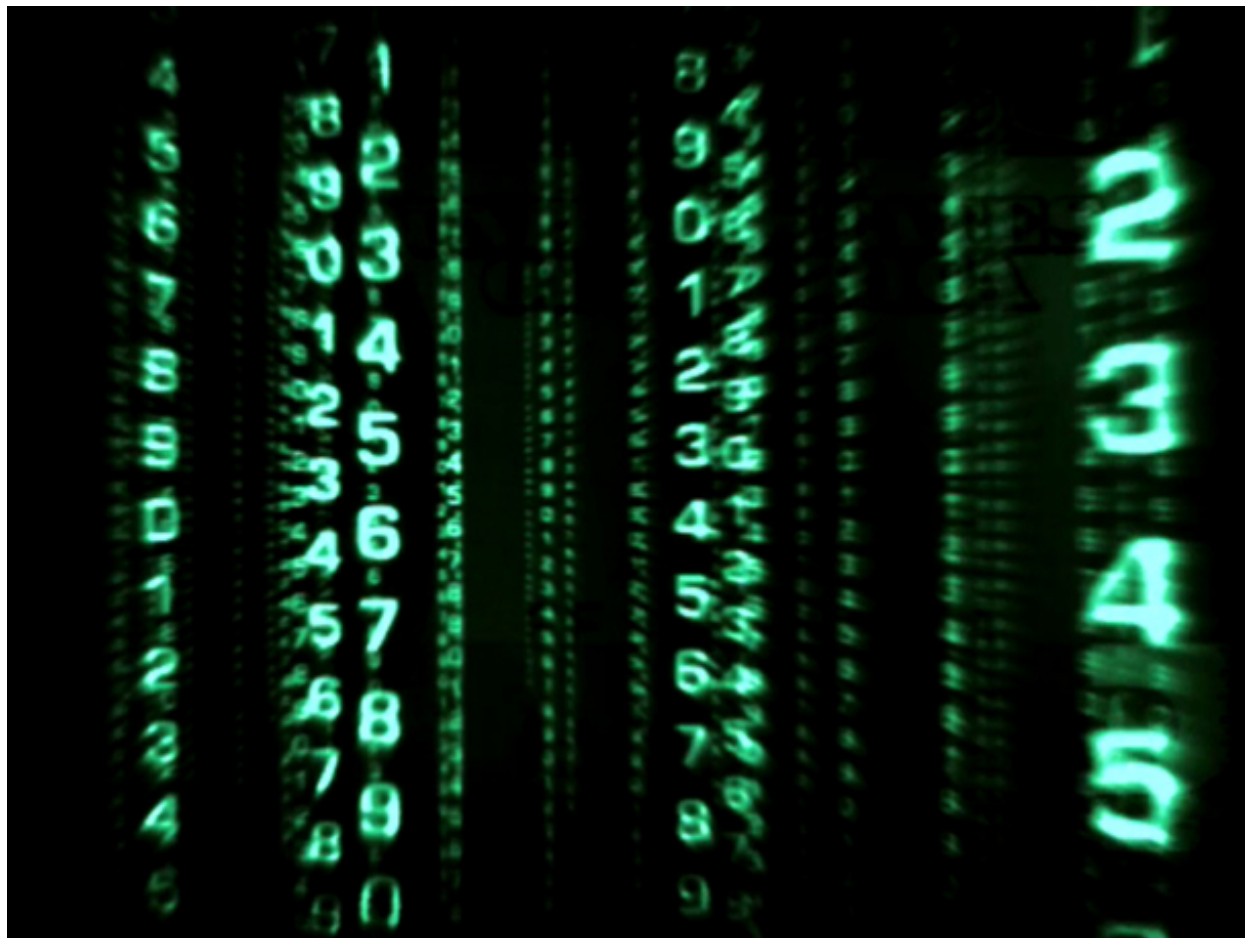


FBI Agent Says No Computer is Safe

March 26, 2014



The head of the FBI's Pittsburgh Cyber Squad concedes he banks and shops online and calls consumer Internet banking "very safe."

But don't assume J. Keith Mularski takes online security for granted.

"Really, the only safe computer is one that's turned off and unplugged from the Internet, and even that may not be safe," Mularski told an audience at Carnegie Mellon University on Monday evening as he and co-panelists Nicolas Christin, an information systems security expert in CMU's Cylab, and Pittsburgh Tribune-Review investigative reporter Andrew Conte debated the pros and cons of an increasingly wired world.

Their panel discussion "Hackers Everywhere: Is the Internet Our Friend?" was the most recent in a series of panels across the country debating cybersecurity and global journalism.

The debate, supported by the Ford Foundation, is occurring even as governments around the world attempt to deal with the increasing free flow of information in a world where Twitter posts can ignite revolution.

Conte, who spent months investigating cybersecurity, told the crowd the Internet is a double-edged sword that threatens banks and energy grids, while allowing for the free flow of information that governments under siege would like to shut down.

Conte said he and his colleagues found that when Egypt tried to shut down commercial servers during protests, the protesters quickly switched to the so-called darknet, or TOR, to get their message across.

The same thing is happening in Turkey, where the government shut down Twitter, Christin said.

"In 48 hours, the number of TOR users in Turkey has grown by maybe 10,000 or more," he estimated.

It's a paradox that will characterize communications in the 21st century, panelists at the discussion hosted by the Overseas Press Club and Carnegie Mellon's College of Engineering agreed.

"Censorship has never been as challenging as it is now. ... At the same time you have massive government surveillance," Christin said.

©2014 The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (Greensburg, Pa.)

<http://www.govtech.com/security/FBI-Agent-Says-No-Computer-is-Safe.html>