Data security and EV skills mean we need a professional register

This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the/an author.

Citation: SAKER, J.M., 2016. Data security and EV skills mean we need a professional register. Automotive Management, March 2016, pp. 71-71.

Additional Information:

- This paper was accepted for publication in the magazine Automotive Management and appears here with the kind permission of the publisher.

Metadata Record: [https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/23717](https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/23717)

Version: Published

Publisher: Bauer Media

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Data security and EV skills mean we need a professional register

By Professor Jim Saker

My role at Loughborough University places me in a privileged position where I get to meet and discuss issues with senior people from other sectors and industries.

The latest such occasion was no different. As I sat in the boardroom of what was the Corps of Commissioner (now Corps Security), under the watchful eye of a portrait of its founder, Captain Sir Edward Walter, we discussed the merits of the university re-launching tailored industry programmes on subjects such as international security, resilience and crisis management.

The surroundings were surreal, with ceremonial swords and military trappings dating back to 1859, when the security company was formed to provide employment for ex-servicemen returning from the Crimean War. However, the discussion could not have been more contemporary.

In a world with a range of different and emerging security threats, the industry has had to radically reinvent itself. The traditional uniforms and practices are long gone and the industry has had to retrain its staff and change its recruitment profiles to survive.

The security sector is broad – it employs people from nightclub bouncers to IT experts working for GCHQ and MI5. What impressed me was its attitude and vision of the future. Predicting a further 30 years of Middle East-based terrorism, it sees a need to professionalise its management and train its people.

Reflecting on the motor trade, it faces similar challenges to the security sector. It needs to keep people safe while driving and over the years, car safety and the quality of servicing have improved. On the whole, customers are treated well and there are close monitoring processes applied to measure performance.

The technological challenge to competence

The issue the automotive sector faces is that over the next five to 10 years, a number of technological changes are likely to take place. Even with lower oil prices, vehicle powertrains are likely to migrate towards battery electric and hydrogen fuel cell. The equipment in the car will continue to become more sophisticated, with an increased emphasis on the connected car and embedded technology. These two factors will combine to present our industry with challenges to both competence and security.

As cars become more complex, the skills required to understand the diagnostics and how to correct any faults will increase. Mistakes have the potential to be costly, both in monetary terms and in areas such as health and safety.

For more data will also be generated about customers, including driving behaviour, lifestyle and potentially their financial circumstances. There is an ongoing debate about who owns this data and who should be allowed to access it.

The security industry has gone down the route of creating a professional register of employees.

For years, the automotive retail sector has struggled to attract people. A registration process, with common standards for technical and non-technical staff, provides a benchmark against which people can be measured. It gives the opportunity for distinguishing the good from the bad and, more importantly, gives the power of exclusion, which will help raise the standards across the sector.

Although this is currently alien to the retail automotive sector, it will take just one major data leak by a dealership employee for the authorities to investigate the procedures dealers have in place.

It may not be a panacea, but there are good arguments for automotive retailers to follow the security industry’s lead and develop a formal register of qualified people that will reassure the public and raise the status of the sector in the eyes of our stakeholders.

"The need to counter cyber-attacks from outside the organisation is matched by spotting the signs of when employees are likely to steal information"