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CS 325

Dr. Salter

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Reviewer’s Report: “Rethinking Passwords”

The article written by William Cheswick attempts to describe the common standard for software authentication procedures. The author opines that current authentication methods are inadequate and inconsistent, which causes headache for end users and does a poor job addressing security concerns. The article does a fair job of outlining various concerns around passwords as well as offers descriptions of current and past best practices for user authentication. Stylistically, the article would benefit from some updates before publishing. The conclusion drawn by the author is somewhat lacking and the author’s suggestions are vague.

The background content presented in the article is well thought out and helpful. Referencing Department of Defense literature does a good job of painting the picture of the current authentication landscape. I would suggest including some more relevant references such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology control frameworks that give very specific guidelines on authentication methods. Specifically addressing controls in the NIST 800-53 control framework would give a much more accurate representation of modern authentication procedures, as most government organizations and financial institutions maintain compliance with this framework.

While the content of the article is sound, the formatting is inconsistent throughout. The author haphazardly jumps between numbered lists, bulleted lists, headings, and sub-headings. If using headings and sub-headings, I would recommend starting out the article with a heading such as ‘Introduction’. The usage of information tables is appreciated, as well as the numbered citations. Regarding the numbered citations, the order of the citations is confusing. The first citation is a ‘4’, which leads the reader to think that they missed the first three citations. The middle content of the article is a blurry line between providing background information on authentication procedures and commentary by the author. It would be beneficial to delineate between the two concerns using the header style formatting that is already in place.

The main shortcoming of the article lies in the author’s suggestions and conclusion. After including a decent amount of specific supporting information about authentication methods, the suggestions presented by the author are non-specific. This article would have much more impact if the suggestions were fleshed out to include sub-sections of specific suggestions related to the talking points in the body of the article. When the author Is suggesting that there be a more universal authentication method, this would be a wonderful place to include more suggestive content on what that method should entail. Although the final paragraph is strong, the conclusion seems to wander and could benefit from some more structure.

Overall, this is a well written article. It includes enough information that any reader can quickly glean the positive and negative aspects of our current authentication landscape, and does a good job of highlighting the author’s perceived pain points. The article would benefit from some formatting tweaks, as well as some more definitive information regarding the author’s conclusive suggestions. This article is ready to publish with the recommended changes.