



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on December 24, 2009

Obama Names Schmidt Chief of Cybersecurity

President Barack Obama on December 22 named Howard Schmidt, an Internet security expert with experience in both the private sector and government, as the White House cybersecurity coordinator.

Schmidt had been serving as president and CEO of the Information Security Forum, which describes itself as “an independent, not-for-profit organisation that supplies authoritative opinion and guidance on all aspects of information security.” He is resigning this position to assume the White House post.



An expert in computer forensics, Schmidt has headed security for Microsoft and eBay. He has 31 years of service in local and federal government, including a time as vice chairman of President George W. Bush’s Critical Infrastructure Protection Board. He has been an adviser to the FBI and worked at the National Drug Intelligence Center.

The White House [website](#) posted a video of Schmidt introducing himself and naming some of the key areas the President has asked him to focus on. These include:

- developing a new, comprehensive strategy to secure American networks;
- ensuring an organized, unified response to future cyberincidents;
- strengthening public-private partnerships here at home and international partnerships with allies and partners;
- promoting research and development of the next generation of technologies; and
- leading a national campaign to promote cybersecurity, awareness, and education.

The reaction among computer security specialists has been generally favorable. Randy Abrams, director of technical education at security software developer ESET, addressed the naming of Schmidt as cybersecurity coordinator in a December 22 [blog entry](#).

“Howard is a very smart person and a very personable man,” Abrams wrote. “The depth of his knowledge and experience definitely makes him one of the best possible candidates for the job.” Abrams did caution against setting expectations too high: “Howard is going to face huge obstacles in trying to coordinate security across a broad swath of government agencies, most all of which will have people who think their way is the only way to do things. There will be budget constraints and the job is enormous.”

All in all, though, Abrams sees Schmidt’s appointment as a step in the right direction: “I believe that with the naming of Schmidt as the cyber security coordinator we will begin to see some progress, but it will take time and it will be painfully slow ... especially for Schmidt.... This is a really positive move for the country.”

Schmidt serves on the board of directors of the data encryption company PGP. Phillip Dunkelberger,



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president and CEO of PGP, offered his reaction: "Having had the privilege to work with Howard for many years, I know he has just the right background and qualifications to design and execute the public-private coordination as well as the international experience that is needed to succeed in the role."

Dunkelberger added, "Howard's familiarity with public sector, private sector, large vendors and small innovative companies should be a great asset to this unique position; one that will just expand as our nation's dependency on cyber communications continues to grow."

Hopefully, Schmidt will keep in mind that the federal government should not dominate the private sector in regard to cybersecurity. The federal government should deal primarily with securing its own systems while allowing the private sector to deal with its own networks. Coordination of security efforts will be necessary, but it would be dangerous if too much power were centralized in the hands of the government.

Photo: Howard Schmidt with Obama



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