Time Out for Station Identification

The IEEE Computer Society publishes magazines and transactions (otherwise known as journals). Each of these vehicles addresses very different reader expectations, and, accordingly, articles in transactions differ substantially in character and form from articles found in IEEE magazines.

Transactions are intended for communicating research results to specialists. Readers can expect these articles to contain novel technical ideas, be technically correct, and accurately position contributions in the research landscape. To meet these expectations, technical experts critique each submission and decide whether the submission is publishable; as a requirement for publication, authors rebut the technical criticisms or make revisions that eliminate the problems. So, a delay of a year or two between submission and publication is not unusual.

An IEEE or Computer Society magazine for a subject area is expected to serve a broader audience. Articles must be written for nonspecialists and present material that, although perhaps new to these readers, would not be considered novel by leading researchers. Technical correctness is still a concern (and is handled through peer review), but exposition is also important. Editing not only addresses grammar and punctuation but extends to structural matters—how the prose flows and whether sufficient background is included for nonspecialists. A more aggressive word limit and a cap on bibliographic citations are intended to further increase the magazine articles' accessibility.

IEEE Security & Privacy is an IEEE Computer Society magazine. It operates much like its kin *Computer*, *Communications of the ACM*, and *IEEE Spectrum*. *IEEE S&P* publishes articles (which are carefully reviewed by anonymous peers for technical correctness) and our regular "departments" (slightly less technical material that each department editor reviews or writes). For both kinds of content, an editorial staff works with the authors to produce copy that is not only consistent with our stylistic conventions but also compelling and engaging to readers. Departments typically are shorter than articles, provide a regular forum for current thinking from the field's experts, enjoy virtually no publications delay, and therefore enable continuity and topical treatments of cross-cutting subjects (our Attack Trends and Building Security In departments, for example) or the milieu (such as our Conference Reports, Biblio Tech, and Book Reviews) associated with security and privacy.

That's the theory, anyway. We recently tested this model against our readership by doing a subscriber survey. Excluding students and libraries from our 4,703 paid subscriptions yields 3,734 paid subscribers; a random sample of 450 brought approximately a 50 percent response rate.

How closely do the measurements fit our model? We found that only 23 percent of our readers have PhDs and only 12 percent are educators. So our readers are decidedly not the collection of faculty and industrial researchers who read a transactions. On the other hand, 37 percent of our readers are either in technical management or corporate management. The application rather than the foundations of technical ideas is more appealing to this audience. And these readers are doubtless also interested in political and economic ramifications of technical work that is shaping their worlds. In short, the observed data does fit the model—quite well (by design).

In under two years, *IEEE S&P* has identified a need and attracted an audience (at a time when most technical magazine subscriptions are in decline). Unlike numerous trade publications, *IEEE S&P* holds its authors to standards of technical accuracy that can be achieved only by using the same rigorous peer-review process that academic journals employ. But unlike a transactions, we seek a "good read," are not driven by commercial interests, and aspire to publishing broadly accessible content. To paraphrase from the title of the 1957 CBS television series that preceded *Gunsmoke* on Saturday nights for six years: Have readers, will publish. □
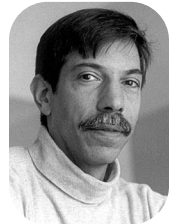
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