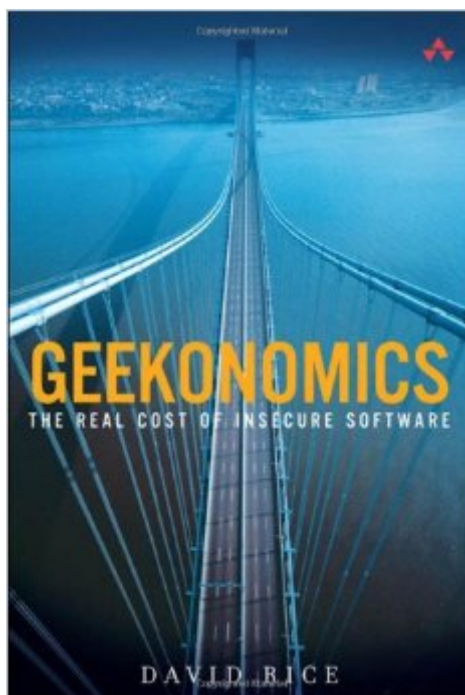


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Geekonomics: The Real Cost Of Insecure Software



Synopsis

“The clarity of David’s argument and the strength of his conviction are truly inspiring. If you don’t believe the world of software affects the world in which you live, you owe it to yourself to read this book.” —Lenny Zeltzer, SANS Institute faculty member and the New York Security Consulting Manager at Savvis, Inc. “Geekonomics stays with you long after you finish reading the book. You will reconsider every assumption you have had about software costs and benefits.” —Slava Frid, Gemini Systems, CTO, Resilience Technology Solutions “Information Security is an issue that concerns governments, companies and, increasingly, citizens. Are the computer systems and software to which we entrust our sensitive and critical information, technologies that are out of control? David Rice has written an important and welcome book that goes to the heart of this issue, and points to solutions that society as a whole needs to debate and embrace.” —Nick Bleech, IT Security Director, Rolls-Royce “If you are dependent upon software (and of course, all of us in the modern world are) this book is a fabulous discussion of how and why we should worry.” —Becky Bace “The Real Cost of Insecure Software” “In 1996, software defects in a Boeing 757 caused a crash that killed 70 people” “In 2003, a software vulnerability helped cause the largest U.S. power outage in decades” “In 2004, known software weaknesses let a hacker invade T-Mobile, capturing everything from passwords to Paris Hilton’s photos” “In 2005, 23,900 Toyota Priuses were recalled for software errors that could cause the cars to shut down at highway speeds” “In 2006 dubbed ‘The Year of Cybercrime,’ 7,000 software vulnerabilities were discovered that hackers could use to access private information” “In 2007, operatives in two nations brazenly exploited software vulnerabilities to cripple the infrastructure and steal trade secrets from other sovereign nations” “Software has become crucial to the very survival of civilization. But badly written, insecure software is hurting people—and costing businesses and individuals billions of dollars every year. This must change. In Geekonomics, David Rice shows how we can change it. Rice reveals why the software industry is rewarded for carelessness, and how we can revamp the industry’s incentives to get the reliability and security we desperately need and deserve. You’ll discover why the software industry still has shockingly little accountability—and what we must do to fix that. Brilliantly written, utterly compelling, and thoroughly realistic, Geekonomics is a long-overdue call to arms. Whether you’re software user, decision maker, employee, or business owner this book will change your life—or even save it. The Alarming Cost of Insecure, Badly Written Software... and How to Finally Fix the Problem, Once and for All! Six billion crash test dummies: why you’re at greater risk than you ever imagined. You pay the price: why consumers

are legally and financially responsible for the mistakes of software manufacturers. Broken windows: how software promotes epidemic cyber crime and threatens national security. Who runs the show?: Why software manufacturers fought against the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's attempts to protect the U.S. blood supply. Protecting national infrastructure: real incentives for transforming software manufacturing. Surviving the information superhighway: practical, must-read advice in a world of insecure code. Preface xiii Acknowledgments xix About the Author xx Chapter 1: The Foundation of Civilization 1 Chapter 2: Six Billion Crash Test Dummies: Irrational Innovation and Perverse Incentives 19 Chapter 3: The Power of Weaknesses: Broken Windows and National Security 73 Chapter 4: Myopic Oversight: Blinded by Speed, Baffled by Churn 131 Chapter 5: Absolute Immunity: You Couldn't Sue Us Even If You Wanted To 179 Chapter 6: Open Source Software: Free, But at What Cost? 243 Chapter 7: Moving Forward: Rational Incentives for a Different Future 273 Epilogue 321 Notes 325 Index 341

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Customer Reviews

I really, really liked Geekonomics, and I think all security and even technology professionals should read it. Why not give the book five stars then? The reasons are twofold: 1) the book fails to adequately differentiate between safety and security; and 2) the chapter on open source demonstrates fundamental misconceptions that unfortunately detract from the author's message. If you are kind enough to keep the thoughts in this review in mind when reading Geekonomics, you will find the book to be thoughtful and exceptionally helpful. It is important to remember that

Geekonomics is almost exclusively a vulnerability-centric book. Remember that the "risk equation" is usually stated as "risk = vulnerability X threat X impact". While it is silly to assign numbers to these factors, you can see that decreasing vulnerability while keeping threat and impact constant results in decreased risk. This is the author's thesis. Rice believes the governing issue in software security is the need to reduce vulnerability. The problem with this approach is that life is vulnerability. It is simply too difficult to eliminate enough vulnerability in order to reduce risk in the real world. Most real world security is accomplished by reducing threats. In other words, the average citizen does not reduce the risk of being murdered by wearing an electrified, mechanized armor suit, thereby mitigating the vulnerability of his soft flesh and breakable neck. Instead, he relies on the country's legal system and police force to deter, investigate, apprehend, prosecute, and incarcerate threats. Consider now the issue of safety vs security. The author makes comparisons using the London sewer, various aspects of driving, and the New York subway system.

Depending on who you ask, mankind has survived on this planet for somewhere between 10,000 and 160,000 years. However, we are the first generation to be dependent on software.

Geekonomics opens with a discussion of the importance of cement and how crucial it is to our civilization. From roads to sewers, cement is our infrastructure and I could not agree more. After the driest summer since they have been measuring such things, the rain has been falling and falling and falling and my farm is one big mudhole. Every unimproved road is dangerous and some of the asphalt is failing. So I am replacing and improving with cement. It is expensive, but cement roads will outlast me, my son and his sons. Software is as important to infrastructure as cement as a foundation of civilization asserts the author of Geekonomics, David Rice, but while considerable energy has been expended to normalize the manufacture and application of cement, much less work has been done with software. While the cement roads we are putting in will last a hundred or more years, the author points out that software is often essentially obsolete by the time the consumer takes possession of it. In fact, consumers value innovation so much, that it is prized above security even if a quick look at the news shows us the cumulative effect of software failure leading to data breach. At this exact moment, according to privacyrights.org, 216,770,536 consumer records have been lost. As Rice points out, in the 1970s the criminal underground realized there was more money to be made, at less risk of being caught, trafficking in drugs than other forms of crime, so it became a big thing.

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