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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

USENIX & SAGE

The Advanced Computing Systems Association &
The System Administrators Guild

letters to the editor

LETTERS FROM USACO FINALISTS

[Better late than never. The following are some of the letters USENIX received back in July from students who attended the USACO training camp. See also page 94 of this issue and page 92 in the August issue of ;login:. Ed.]

My name is Songzi Du, and I am one of the 15 USACO finalist this year. I am very grateful for Usenix's sponsoring of USACO camp. The camp brought 15 bright teens from all over the nation together at Wisconsin to think about computer science for a week without any distraction. We learned a lot there. Besides the programming part of the week, I also enjoyed the disc golf and a trip to Chicago. Thank you very much for your sponsoring of USACO.

Songzi

I am writing you to thank you for sponsoring the USA Computing Olympiad, a program in which I have participated for two years. Let me assure of the program's value; in fact, I know that my peers and I consider it to be the premier high school computer science competition as well as the best training program in algorithmic computer science available. Camp this year was a blast, like last year, and the coaches worked very hard, as always, to teach us a lot about the subject material. I'm looking forward to representing the U.S. at the international competition later this month; I think that we will have one of our most competitive teams ever this year, largely thanks to USENIX's support.

Thanks again,

Tom Widland

Thank you very much for sponsoring USACO and making the training camp, which I recently attended, possible!

Anatoly Preygel

I was a finalist at the USA Computing Olympiad. I wanted to thank you for your sponsorship of that organization. It was an excellent experience for me, and I learned a lot. I appreciate your making this possible. Thank you.

Jeff Cohen

Thank you for your continuing support of the USA Computing Olympiad. This year I attended the USACO Training Camp in Wisconsin for the first time, and it was a great experience. The camp's lectures, labs, and competitions offer students an invaluable opportunity to learn about computer science. Without your financial support, this wonderful experience would not have been possible. Thank you.

Jeff Arnold

ON DRM

from Gregory P. Smith
greg@electricrain.com

I must take issue with Daniel Geer's caution against supporting the opposition to digital rights management (DRM) in his column on Electronic Property [October 2001]. The opponents of DRM solutions available from today's slow-moving institutions are doing property based democracies a favor. Insufficient DRM solutions are being exposed for the con-jobs that they are. That should lead to better ones being developed. Unfortunately today's slow-moving institutions seem to spend more on lawyers and politicians. They would rather make it illegal to show how bad their solution is than to spend the same money developing a good solution. A DRM solution in all democratic citizens' best interest will be an open standard involving zero royalties or licensing fees.

more letters . . .

OCTOBER 2001 MUSINGS

From: Murray Stokely
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I liked your Musings about the security of open source operating systems, but one thing sort of bugged me. It always kind of irks me when I see “OpenBSD” singled out above the other BSDs for security.

Sure they did a stellar job a couple of years ago by doing an incredible amount of code review but the other BSDs have caught on now. Singling out OpenBSD is unfair for several reasons :

- FreeBSD supports a number of security-related features that the OpenBSD team just does not have the resources to develop, such as Mandatory Access Controls (DARPA-funded) and the lower-level mechanisms that make this work (See Robert Watson’s papers at the last two Usenix conferences).
- The FreeBSD installation program prompts the user to decide if they would like to run inetd at all. Even if they choose yes, all services are turned off by default and they will have to be enabled in the installation program or turned on in the inetd.conf file (which contains nothing but commented out entries).
- FreeBSD offers the selection of “security profiles” during installation. These profiles can prevent the loading of kernel modules, changing of file flags, and various other potentially risky activities.
- FreeBSD has a very active security team doing independent code audits in addition to picking up all of the OpenBSD and NetBSD security changes. Indeed, our recent release of FreeBSD 4.4 was delayed for five days because of some security-related NetBSD changes that we wanted to include.

- There are many more eyes looking over the FreeBSD code than the OpenBSD code.

I certainly think that the OpenBSD guys deserve a lot of credit, and I don’t want to argue about the relative merits of the different BSDs. I just think it’s unfair to continue to single out OpenBSD as the “secure” BSD. When compared to FreeBSD, there are many security-related features that OpenBSD is lacking.

Murray – (BSD-enthusiast in general, FreeBSD developer in particular)

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