# 'I love the creativity'

From advising GCHQ to Nerf gun battles, protecting tech still excites Dr Guy Bunker of Clearswift, says **Chris Moss**



Dr Guy Bunker, 51, is senior vice-president of products at Clearswift, a Berkshire-based firm that's been providing cybersecurity solutions for local and national government, defence and finance since its founding in 1982.

The firm also works with foreign agencies, which means that Dr Bunker's job starts long before he leaves home.

"I usually check my email when I get up around 6:30am," he says. "We have about 2,500 clients and do work for all the big acronyms – GCHQ, NATO, the [American] National Security Agency and Homeland Security.

"I have people who work for me in Australia and in the US, so a quick check while I'm still at home gives me a heads-up on anything that's happened overnight," he explains.

When he arrives at Clearswift's modern lakeside HQ in Theale, near Reading, he has responsibility for 60 staff, many of whom are overseeing the development of new software.

"On site, we have a lab full of machines including some pretty hefty laptops on which you can run an entire IT infrastructure. We have to be able to do realistic tests of the products we provide, because firms depend utterly on their email and web platforms at all times – if they go down, they lose business, and money."

He likens the way the lab software works to a weatherman modelling his forecasts. "We can simulate any given problem a customer might encounter."

Although his role is very varied, he admits that his greatest pleasure still comes from the coding that underpins all the security solutions.



**In the know** Dr Guy Bunker leads a team of 60 developing new software at Clearswift

"It's you versus the machine," he says. "I love the creativity of solving a problem and then being able to share that solution with a customer.

"Cybersecurity used to be about protecting a perimeter through firewalls and such but it has evolved into something much, much bigger."

Dr Bunker spends most of his mornings in discussions with a product manager or development team. "We review any new customer enhancement requests and how they can be generalised to be of use to other customers," he explains. "We have to be able to upgrade systems without impacting on a company or national agency's activities."

Clearswift's state-sponsored contracts provide a vital window on the future, he says. "They are very well-funded and allow us to be innovative.

"But we also know that the same threats facing national agencies are likely to threaten companies inside 18 months to three years. By learning on the Government contracts we are ell prepared to advise private clients later on."

The enemies that he and his colleagues are squaring up to aren't necessarily (or even principally) hackers or outsiders. "The main threat facing organisations usually comes from the inside. This 'enemy within' might be an employee making an error because he or she has brought malware [viruses or disruptive software] into work by accident or leaked critical information when using email, social media or an app like Dropbox."

Unsurprisingly, the media takes an increasingly keen interest in Clearswift's projects.

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"I work a great deal with marketing and there's usually a lunch-time deadline for comment on stories in the media or a call with a publication," says Dr Bunker.

"I try to get out for a 20- minute stroll in the middle of the day to get some fresh air and grab a sandwich. If there's a client visiting the office, I often get the lunchtime slot.

"In the afternoons I'll be on conference calls with the US, and then with the legal team going through contracts," he continues.

"I'm also responsible for our technical strategy, so time is then spent researching potential acquisition targets and how they would fit into our overall strategy, which then requires a business case to be prepared."

Fridays are the exception: "At the end of the week we get out the Nerf guns, then, after a playfight, we head for the beer fridge. It's to let off steam, and also to get people with different roles – including engineers, who can still be introverted – to mix."

When he gets home, Dr Bunker doesn't always close his laptop.

"I spend a lot of my evenings – too many – reading about threats and new risks. My coding might be rusty these days, but it's vital that I know what's going on."

◗ *The Telegraph's major new Cybersecurity conference, which will be bringing together chief executives and board directors, will take place in London on Tuesday 17 May 2016. To receive updates, email jessica.jones@ telegraph.co.uk*

## GETTING A JOB IN CYBERSECURITY

Dr Bunker shares some advice for those looking for a role

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1. Learn to code, and don't believe anyone who tells you it's boring – it's actually a very creative activity

2. Develop the ability to communicate your ideas, on paper but also in person

3. IT security is a problem everywhere, so don't limit yourself in terms of your horizons – I've travelled all over the world with the job

4. Be prepared to be surprised by others, and yourself. Nobody ever thought I'd write anything, and I've published four books already. I've even had to speak at the United Nations!

5. To be successful, you need to be creative – we look for psychologists and data analysts as well as coders. Think of cybersecurity as you would, say, law: a massive, diverse field

*Clearswift sponsors the Cyber Security Challenge (cybersecuritychallenge.org.uk)*