

KnowledgeNets begin to reach deep into Latin America

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In Latin America, the privacy community is growing with alacrity. That's evident in looking at the growth of the IAPP KnowledgeNet activity in the region. What began with a conversation on a rooftop in 2011 then spawned a small gathering of privacy professionals in Mexico City, Mexico. Which has in turn expanded into a KnowledgeNet network with representation from Bogota, Colombia, to Lima, Peru, and now Buenos Aires, Argentina, Latin America's newest chapter.

While every group's story is different, each KnowledgeNet chair recalls a snowball speed of interest in the meetings. "We started [informally] three years ago," said Buenos Aires KnowledgeNet Co-Chair Pablo Palazzi. "We started to be only a few, and then people started to join due to courses at my university and seminar and inviting personally other people." Fast forward to 2015, where the topic of discussion was the European Court of Justice's decision on the Schrems complaint. "Because this is a European case, we did not expect to many people to attend. But there were around 80 people in the room!"

Argentine KnowledgeNet Co-Chair Diego Fernández added that while such high numbers of attendance are not the norm, his "experience so far is that the meetings are really productive in terms of their content and the networking," with the monthly gatherings covering everything from "privacy in apps and on the Internet" to "Congress's agenda in terms of bills that may have any impact on data protections regulations – just to name a few," he said.

Of course, not all growth is a straight line up and up. For at least one KNet chair, the biggest source of frustration is that such high turnouts are not consistent. "Sadly, even when the market is growing, the KnowledgeNets haven't grown," said Mexico City KnowledgeNet Co-Chair Juan Carlos Carillo, CIPT.

IAPP Latin American Managing Director and Founder of the Mexico City KnowledgeNet chapter Rosa Franco, CIPP/US, argued that part of the issue is that while the interest exists in the region, those across the globe have yet to focus on Latin America as a potential privacy hub. It's not so much a lack of demand, but moreso a supply issue.

of professionals, now involved in other matters, will develop as well,” she said. “For now, there are not many professionals involved, but they will get involved as a result of the demand of the market and clients.”

Fernández shared similar opinions. “I would like to see the Latin American privacy profession at the forefront of the discussions and with a greater sense of privacy responsibility,” he said. “I think that we are going in the right direction and that participation in the IAPP association, either through their annual meetings or their local chapters, benefits the discussions and brings better privacy pros to the region.”

In the meantime, Franco and her host of KnowledgeNet chairs have big plans ahead. “I would love to see more and more people looking to the KnowledgeNets as their source for new information related to privacy locally and globally,” Carillo said. “I would love to have a local certification, more value added to the enterprises, and the [data protection authorities] having more critical advice.”

Franco echoed his sentiments. Fostering robust individual and corporate representation in these meetings increases the flow of expert dialogue in an industry that is still young. “Considering that the subject matter is quite new, many things have to be learned and we have to be open to share knowledge and opinions,” she said.

It’s not all just postulating, either. There are talks of expanding chapters to other provinces, and encouragement from KnowledgeNet leaders to develop more large-scale, Latin American-specific events. “There’s a lot to do in the region,” Palazzi said.

Ultimately, it all comes down to establishing an organizational representation in the area. “The IAPP has to be present in Latin America and grow along with the region’s privacy and data protection regulations,” said Fernández. In fact, he continued, the organization’s ongoing support is “vital for spreading the word throughout the region and that is particularly true in the Latin American region.”

“After all,” noted Franco, “privacy is a global matter.”

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