

How to Become One of the Most Respected Companies in Your Industry

The Story of Tripwire and the Security Industry



By David Spark
Founder, Spark Media Solutions
June 27, 2011
Twitter: [@dspark](https://twitter.com/dspark)

Up until 2010, Tripwire, an IT security company had a very limited view as to who were the influencers in the information security industry. Prior to the explosion of social media, research firms appeared to have all the influence. While research firms are extremely valuable to the security ecosystem, they're not the only ones who have influence over potential buyers of IT security products.

In reality, these buyers aren't necessarily that tuned into the security news. They often rely on information and advice from security industry mavens who build their influence through blogging, podcasting, tweeting, organizing members of the security community, and in-person conversations – often at live events. Through all their online and offline communications, these influencers were not just beacons associated with a well established research outlet. They were building a relationship with their audience. The audience was getting to

know them, and the influencers in turn were getting to know their audience.

If Tripwire was to be part of this ecosystem, they'd have to do the same. "The way to get at these other influencers was to start forming a genuine relationship," said Matt Hixson, Tripwire's social media strategist.

It was at this time Spark Media Solutions was introduced to Tripwire.



A successful integrated marketing campaign includes relationship building

In 2010, Tripwire wanted to make a big splash with one of its products with the introduction of its log management application. Like any IT security company that wanted to be seen in the industry they invested heavily in the RSA Conference, the premier security conference for the IT industry.

Tripwire paid to have a booth at RSA, staffed it, gave away t-shirts, and held contests where they raffled off iPhones, iPods, and many more prizes. In addition, they sponsored the biggest bash of the conference, the closing night "Codebreakers" party at San Francisco City Hall.



Tripwire booth at the RSA Conference in 2010



Matt Hixson, Tripwire's social media strategist

It was a marketing and publicity blow out. Tripwire was doing everything right when it came to traditional PR, media outreach, and demand generation activities. But they couldn't be self sufficient. Each media arm needed support from the other.

"We needed an integrated marketing campaign, where you involve traditional media outreach efforts, traditional pipeline funnel, but incorporate the new social media approach to be part of the conversation, engage with key influencers, learn from the conversations, and provide value to those prospects and customers," said Hixson.

So Tripwire hired the Spark Media Solutions team to report on the conference from the editorial (not sales) viewpoint of Tripwire, which focused on security issues regarding compliance.

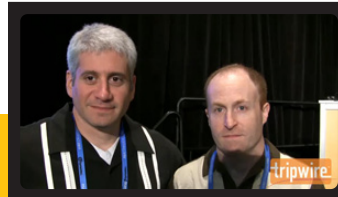
Each industry has different rules and requirements for managing the ongoing security of critical data, especially credit card data, within their

entire system. Getting compliance, maintaining compliance, and also trying to build better security, which is not equal to compliance, is an ongoing IT issue and a moving target. Tripwire's solutions can be part of that compliance/security equation, thus they're interested in being part of those conversations. And at RSA, there were plenty of discussions and conversations on compliance and security.

This is where it was critical to not just shoot self-promotional publicity videos about Tripwire from Tripwire employees, but rather interview the industry influencers about their opinions on security and compliance. Tripwire's potential buying audience already had a relationship with these influencers. The audience would prefer to get information and advice from people they already knew and trusted.

Not surprisingly, buyers are very cautious about getting security advice from vendors. They want to get advice from the pundits whose blogs they already read, podcasts they already listened to, and people they already follow on Twitter.

So to help Tripwire, I wanted to find those influencers who cared about compliance and security, and get their opinions.



Tripwire interviews security experts at the RSA Conference in 2010 & 2011

Benefits to interviewing rather than pitching

Companies have trained themselves into believing that communicating with press and influencers involves pitching new announcements and then hoping someone shows interest. This is a self-interested approach. To build true relationships that will last, one must begin a relationship by caring about the journalist, blogger, or influencer. You can accomplish this by interviewing. Interviewing provides so many more benefits over pitching, such as:

- Interviewing is a great way to make an introduction**
Far easier to ask and get acceptance to the question, "What do you care about?" rather than "Could you come by our booth and watch our demo for 10 minutes?"
- Interviewing offers a platform**
Influencers need to be recorded and have an audience in order to be influencers. Since the interview will be published on your blog, you're providing a new platform for which the influencer needs to increase their influence.
- Interviewing begins a dialogue**
Often the advice for PR people is "find what the influencer cares about and pitch them that." But that advice never includes actually interviewing the influencer and publishing that interview. If you do publish an interview, then you're engaging in an open conversation rather than pulling a stealthy "we're spying on you" kind of pitch.
- Interviewing and then publishing is an implied endorsement**
When you interview an influencer and publish their name, image, and/or voice on your blog (make sure you tell them where it's going to be published), it becomes an implied endorsement of your brand even though the influencer may or may not be saying anything about your brand.

In the end, because you chose to listen and observe, and then publish those findings for the industry, you're seen as giving back and bettering the entire industry.



*David Spark reports for Tripwire
at the 2011 RSA Conference*

Tripwire had a blog with no social media plan

Launched in 2008, Tripwire's blog was originally designed under the "build it and they will come" mentality. Hixson quickly learned that for blogging, "The Field of Dreams" strategy doesn't work.

Building a blog is a good start, but the next step to get people to come is actual engagement.

"Key part of our plan must be listening to the market and engaging in conversations that already exist, not just our own," said Hixson. "That needs to be 80 percent of what we do."

Where are the influencers?

Hixson wasn't exactly sure who the influencers were. He dug through Twitter and blogs and noticed a lot of key people were connected to Tripwire's founder and CTO, Gene Kim.

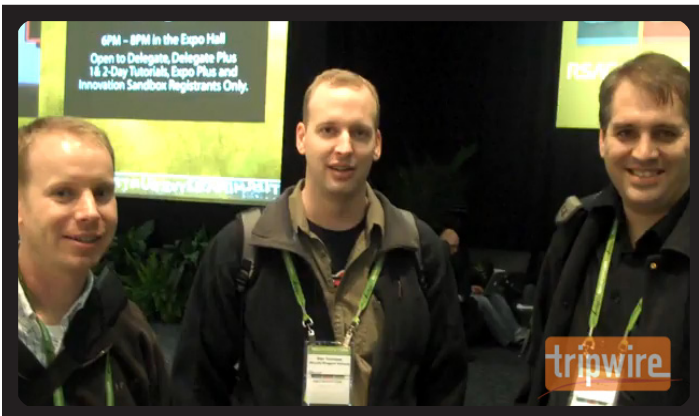
Kim is a rock star in the security industry. His stature and brand in the industry were just the icebreakers Tripwire needed to form relationships with the security elite.

Before the RSA Conference, Hixson collected the names of people connected to Gene Kim, reviewed the speaker and attendee list, and compiled a

generic list of people who looked interesting and could be influencers. Admittedly, he wasn't sure, but he knew it was a good place to start. I reviewed the list and headed to the trade show.

As I walked into the conference, the first people I stumbled into were three influencers on Tripwire's list: Ben Tomhave, Martin McKeay, and Andrew Storms. Not wanting to miss an opportunity, I quickly pulled out my camera and began recording. [That interview](#) became a seminal moment for Tripwire as it turned the corner of how they began engaging with security influencers. Most significantly, it opened the door to building an important relationship with McKeay.

At the end of the three day conference, our team had [produced 35 articles of which 27 included video](#) and all of that content went up live while the event was happening. Tripwire's Twitter ID ([@Tripwireinc](#)) and my Twitter ID ([@dspark](#)) were both on the top ten list of most retweeted IDs during a conference with more than 17,000 attendees.



Andrew Storms, Ben Tomhave, and Martin McKeay at the 2010 RSA Conference

While competitors who chose to write and shoot videos took a week or more after the conference to post produce the content, Spark Media Solutions' coverage was immediate. All of our videos and articles went live as the conference was happening. This increased Tripwire's physical and online visibility in search and social media, during the most critical time, which was when people were attending and paying attention to news coming out of the RSA Conference. In addition, the videos and reporting aligned Tripwire's interests with the biggest names in security, and it also validated many of Tripwire's security strategies and messaging.

Hixson admitted of all the money they spent at RSA – the booth, the party, giveaways – Spark Media Solutions' coverage of the conference was the best value for dollars spent and positively impacted their overall brand and business.

Tripwire video interview with Martin McKeay, host of the Network Security Podcast

"We did not realize the total value we would receive from the work we did with David Spark. The video content he produced created value beyond our expectations at the event and well beyond. David is the perfect balance between aggressive and personable that is needed to get this type of work done," Hixson said.

The 2010 RSA Conference was such a success that Tripwire upped their coverage for the following year.



From "Yeah, we know Tripwire" to "Yeah, we love Tripwire"

When I returned the next year to report on the RSA Conference for Tripwire, things had dramatically changed. While people spoke positively about Tripwire the previous year, it had shifted up to a new level. Conversations were now glowing. People I spoke to kept saying they love Tripwire.

It wasn't always that way, explained Hixson. It's not that people were down on Tripwire, they were just confused. The Tripwire brand had a legacy of being an open source tool and that image had been stuck in many users' heads, specifically network

administrators, and it was staying there. The information they had about Tripwire wasn't moving up the organizational ladder.

The 2011 passionate response to Tripwire was the result of influencer outreach and community building that continued throughout the year after the 2010 RSA Conference.

"We started to do things that were for the betterment of the community. And because we were seen as doing these things, Tripwire as a brand gets brought along with that," said Hixson.

It was a similar exercise to what Gary Vaynerchuk did, explained Hixson. As a wine merchant, Vaynerchuk just answered anybody's question about wine. He didn't push an agenda, he just provided solutions for people's questions thus quickly creating the perception that he's a wine expert.

Similarly, Tripwire has gone out of its way to support the RSA Conference's shadow event, Security B-Sides, a user-built conference run by the security community. Members of Security B-Sides are passionate about security. Understanding this audience, supporting them, and building genuine relationships with them was going to be a core part of Tripwire being perceived as experts in the industry, Hixson said.



Not only does Tripwire sponsor Security B-Sides financially, but they also offer services in times of need. For example, one of the conference producers, Mike Dahn, needed a Security B-Sides logo. Instead of just giving his group the money to go find a designer to then design the logo, Tripwire just said, "We've got designers. We'll create one for you."

Being recognized by your efforts

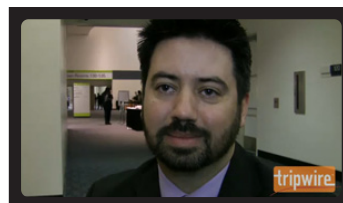
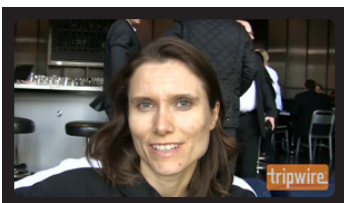
For the 2011 RSA Conference, Tripwire was more targeted on the coverage they wanted. The Tripwire social media team had spent the past year building relationships and knew who were the most important people and sessions to cover.

Working with Tripwire, the Spark Media Solutions team caught up with and interviewed tons of industry people. In three days of coverage, [we produced 38 articles of which 36 included video](#). Half of them were published during the show and the other half went live within the week.

Everyone in the security industry noticed. Most notably the people who were in the videos. Want someone to watch your video? Make them the star of the video.

All of the content was published on the Tripwire blog, thus bringing lots of traffic from those interested in the RSA Conference and the people spotlighted in the videos.

One of the most notable people who saw the videos was security journalist Bill Brenner of *CSO*



Online, a top-tier online publication geared towards Chief Security Officers. He saw our coverage and [published six of the videos up on his blog](#) with the comment:

“It’s an all-star cast, really, and the video quality is quite good. The interviews were conducted by David Spark. I got to see him in action and I end up in the background of a couple clips. He did a great job.”

- Bill Brenner, *CSO Online*

Hixson reads Brenner’s blog every day. He’s as influential a security press person as you can get. In the past, Tripwire had the traditional PR relationship with Bill. They would just pitch him stories, said Hixson.

Security journalist Bill Brenner of CSO Online

To get these videos published on *CSO Online*, no press release was ever sent to Brenner. Nobody asked him to “blog about Tripwire.” Instead, we just created content from the editorial voice of Tripwire. We connected to the key people in the industry, and as a journalist Brenner saw the value Tripwire was bringing to the security community. It wasn’t PR, it was a combination of traditional press and social media influencer efforts.

“Since Bill put our content out there, we’ve reached an audience we normally don’t reach,” Hixson said.



The security industry has embraced Twitter

Most of us live on email. Not so for the security industry. Twitter has become the influencers’ preferred form of communications. The highest level influencers are on Twitter, and they’re more willing to respond on that platform than in email.

“If you send a security influencer an email you won’t hear from them for a week. But if you DM them on Twitter they’ll get back to you in 30 seconds, if you have a relationship with them,” Hixson said.

This is very true. After I saw Brenner had posted my videos, I pointed him to three more videos via email. I got no response. I then sent a tweet and heard back within seconds. Minutes later he posted my three extra recommended videos.



The value of community and relationship building



"Hug It Out" recording with Mike Dahn, Gene Kim, Martin McKeay, and Josh Corman

Adhering to the "What can we do for the security community?" credo, Tripwire goes out of its way to promote other security industry efforts. Most notably they promoted an event they called the "[Hug It Out](#)" series, which was designed to clear the air between two security influencers who used to be rivals, Mike Dahn, one of the founders of Security B-Sides, and Josh Corman, respected analyst of The 451 Group. The two had varying opinions on a key industry issue, PCI compliance. Their industry arguments started to get very personal and very public.

After Tripwire founder Gene Kim first tried to bring the two together at the 2010 Security B-Sides conference in Las Vegas, Tripwire helped bring the two warring parties together to air their grievances on Martin McKeay's Security Network Podcast. Over three different episodes, they were hoping the two could come to some agreement and actually hug. People started rallying around the "Hug It Out" series. Community members began

placing bets as to whether they would hug, said Hixson. Eventually, They did.

The three shows were a huge success. Dahn, McKeay, and Corman were all so appreciative of Tripwire's involvement that they wanted to return the favor.

They said to Hixson's colleague Cindy Valladares, "Who can we introduce you to?" At the conference, the three influencers went out of their way to personally introduce her to key people within the PCI community. She didn't even know who she should know, so they told her and made the introductions.

Those introductions unlocked a whole new level.

"It allowed me to get immediate credibility with other influencers because of who was introducing me," said Valladares, "And it furthered my relationship with the industry as a whole."

ROI is the return on relationships

Thanks to the community building efforts over the past year, Tripwire, Hixson, and Valladares are becoming trusted agents among the network of security influencers.

“We can build relationships that we could never do before, and we can access people that we couldn’t access before,” Hixson said.

In social media, there’s always the discussion of people who “get it” and those who don’t “get it.” But I feel this goes much further. It’s one thing to “get” social media and branded journalism, it’s another thing to put the money, time, and effort toward it like any other marketing effort.

*David Spark’s 2011 RSA Conference
end of show report*

While Spark Media Solutions was integral to kicking off Tripwire’s relationship building efforts and developing a media voice for their blog, the ultimate credit goes to the entire Tripwire team for seeing the value in keeping those relationships going.



About Tripwire, Inc.

Tripwire is a leading global provider of IT security and compliance automation solutions that help businesses, government agencies, and service providers take control of their physical, virtual, and cloud infrastructure. Thousands of customers rely on Tripwire’s integrated solutions to help protect sensitive data, prove compliance and prevent outages. Tripwire VIA™, the integrated compliance

and security software platform delivers best-of-breed file integrity, policy compliance and log and event management solutions, paving the way for organizations to proactively achieve continuous compliance, mitigate risk, and ensure operational control through Visibility, Intelligence and Automation. Learn more at www.tripwire.com and [@TripwireInc](https://twitter.com/TripwireInc) on Twitter.

About Spark Media Solutions

Spark Media Solutions is a media production and consulting firm that offers custom publishing services (a.k.a. branded journalism or content marketing).

Spark Media Solutions helps businesses become media networks as an arm of their marketing, sales, and public relations efforts. Given that content is now the currency of social media and

search, we utilize storytelling and social media to turn our clients into the number one voice in their respective industries.

Our most popular service is live event reporting and production.

Learn more at www.sparkmediasolutions.com.

Author: David Spark

David Spark is the founder of Spark Media Solutions. For more than 15 years, Spark has worked as a journalist and producer reporting on the tech industry in print, radio, TV, and online. His articles and advice have appeared in more than 40 media outlets including eWEEK, Wired News, PC Computing, PC World, Smart Computing, and TechTV. He's also worked as an analyst for The Guidewire Group and Gerson Lehrman Group.

In addition, Spark squandered more than a dozen years working as a stand-up comedian and comedy writer for The Second City comedy troupe in Chicago.

Today, Spark is a regular contributor to Mashable, Socialmedia.biz, Technologizer, and KQED's "This Week in Northern California."

For more, read Spark's blog, the "[Spark Minute](#)," and follow him on Twitter [@dspark](#).

Contact: david@sparkmediasolutions.com

