

«Direct feedback about my work motivates me»

Laurent Zimmerli, Security Engineer

Mr. Zimmerli, congratulations! Your paper, Rating Autonomous Systems, won the Best Paper Award at the International Conference on Internet Monitoring and Protection in Venice.

What does this award mean to you?

→ Laurent Zimmerli: Naturally I'm proud of the award, no question. The paper grew out of my master's thesis at ETH, which I wrote in collaboration with Open Systems. Bernhard Tellenbach from the Communication Systems Group at ETH supported me during the writing of the thesis under the supervision of Prof. Plattner. He also encouraged me to write an article and supported me in my application to speak at the conference in Venice.

What exactly is your thesis about?

→ The Internet is made up of independent sub-networks mostly operated by ISPs, known as «autonomous systems» in the jargon. When you send a data packet from A to B, it traverses a number of such autonomous systems, which are connected to each other by what is termed «peering.» The quality of a connection from A to B can be reliably measured. It depends very much on the quality of the individual networks, of course. Now the question was whether one can measure the quality of the individual networks – and if so, how – in order to send the data only via the highest-quality networks from the start.

That sounds exciting.

What is your conclusion?

→ Put very concisely, independent third parties can only examine the quality of autonomous systems to a limited extent. This is because from the outside you don't have direct access to the infrastructure of the individual autonomous systems. As a result, there are only a very few analysis tools you can use to measure the quality. And even then they don't always measure precisely what you need. So in my paper I describe statistical approaches that enable you to assess the quality of the systems. By the way, the

paper was published by the IEEE Computer Society and can be ordered from their portal.

You studied IT at ETH. What brought you to Open Systems?

→ I attended a lecture by our CEO Martin Bosshardt. It was one of a series of lectures organized by VIS, the Association of IT Students. Back then I wanted to write my master's thesis in the field of specialist security and knew of the cooperation between ETH and Open Systems that has existed for many years. That was a stroke of luck, because the support I got from the colleagues at Open Systems was really exceptional. My supervisor's personal dedication was huge and made a significant difference to the quality of my thesis.

You are a security engineer at Mission Control Labs. What exactly is your job?

→ Our labs are organized in teams that are responsible for various areas of Mission Control Security Services. One of the things our team is responsible for is the front end of the Mission Control Cockpit, with which our customers control and monitor their services. We work in the area of technology and product evaluation as well as maintaining and expanding the services. In addition, like all security engineers at Open Systems, I spend one day a week at the Mission Control Operation Center and look after the running of our services.

Does working in operations at Mission Control influence your work as a security engineer?

→ Definitely – very much, in fact. Because my assignment involves me using the front end just like our clients, I experience first-hand how valuable it is proving to be in practice and also find out where there is potential for improvement. During these assignments I get valuable feedback from colleagues and of course directly from customers too. This unfiltered user feedback, which is actually pretty unusual in classic

software development, motivates me and from the word go has always been a powerful argument for my professional commitment at Open Systems.

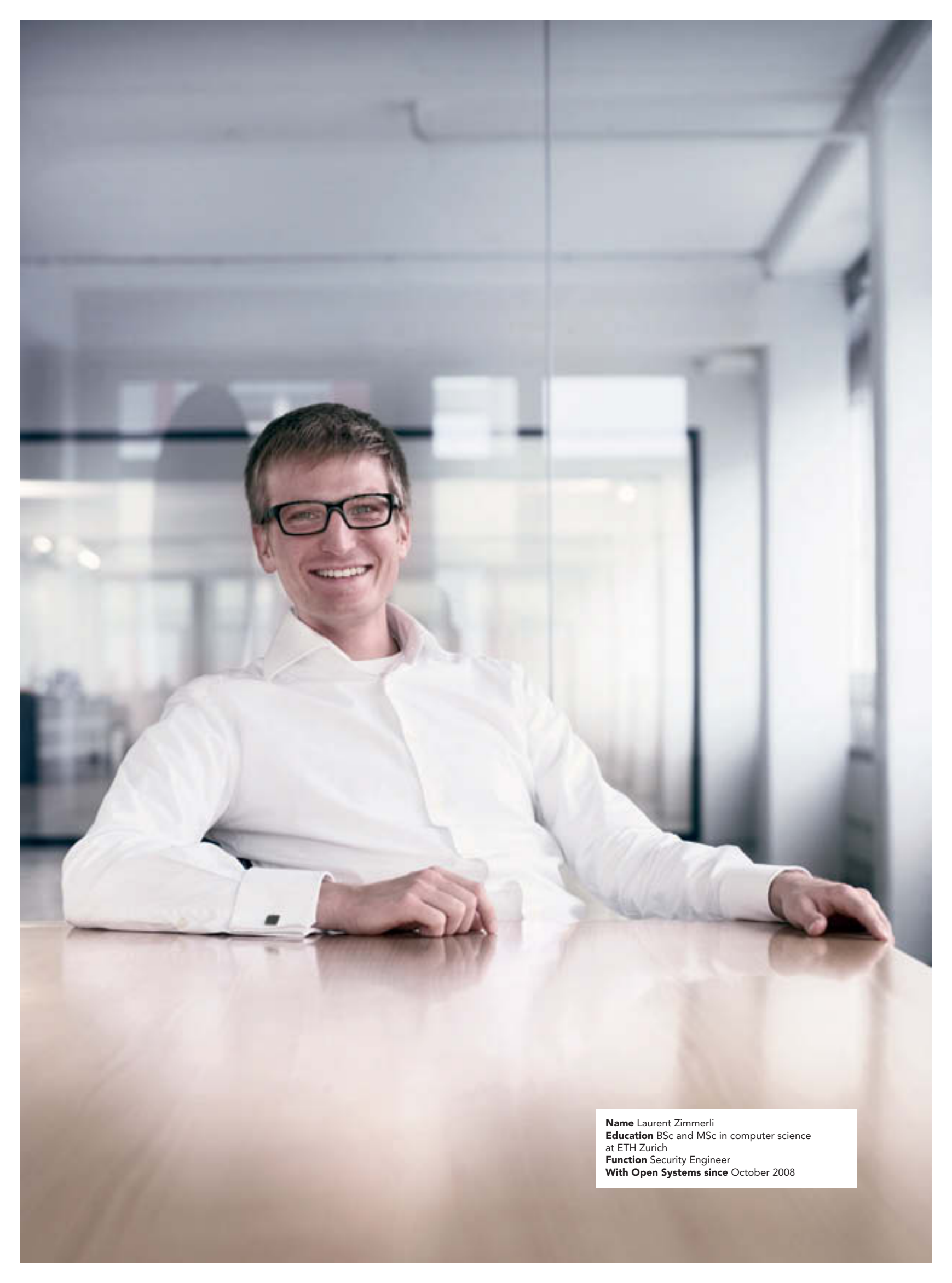
What would you say distinguishes Mission Control Security Services from other security systems?

→ From the customer's point of view, the excellent service quality certainly makes a significant difference. As I see it, two main factors are responsible for that: firstly, the expertise that is available to the customer from our security engineers. Anyone who has ever battled his way through first- or second-level support, knows how efficient and effective it is if you can talk directly to an expert. Everyone who contacts our Operation Center always talks to a certified Mission Control security engineer, with no exceptions.

The second factor that I would call unusual is the way the staff at Open Systems identify with their work. We identify strongly with the company and our services and are conscious of our responsibility towards our customers. No one here is a «clock-puncher.» I am convinced that our customers are very much aware of both these factors in their daily work with Mission Control.

What do you do in your free time?

→ In the spring and summer, you will often find me out on my motorbike on weekends. Apart from that I have started to do sports again regularly: I play a lot of squash and, thanks to a regular training regime, was able to run a marathon in Florence last summer in under four hours. In the winter I normally spend a lot of time on my snowboard. But this year I have not yet managed to do any boarding, since I spent the turn of the year on my first three-month deployment to Mission Control in Sydney, Australia. To make up for that, I managed to surf almost every day during my stay «down under.» That's not bad for an alternative, isn't it? •



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