



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Newsgroup Posting 1

Author(s)

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Description

A newsgroup posting about the circumstances surrounding the discovery of LaMacchia's activities and the response by the MIT administration.

Body

In the MIT tech newspaper:

"We became aware sometime in December that a computer was being used to distribute software," said Kenneth D. Campbell, director of the news office. "That information was turned over to Campus Police and the FBI. MIT personnel cooperated with the FBI in the investigation."

The incident was discovered when an Athena-user in the Student Center cluster noticed that an unattended workstation next to him was behaving abnormally, making frequent disk accesses, according to James D. Bruce ScD '60, vice president for Information Systems.

The user apparently reported the abnormal behavior to members of the Student Information Processing Board, who then proceeded to investigate the matter,

according to a source familiar with the investigation. The SIPB members saw the status of the workstation and reported the incident to the Information Systems staff, the source said.

Most places I know of, if something like an FSP site was found, the Dean or equivalent would take the student to one side and give him a good verbal rap on the knuckles - maybe suspend his account for a time - and put him back on the straight and narrow with the fear of god in him. It's pretty depressing that schools are now so litigation-scared that they feel they have to cover their backs and get the police involved. This is the effect SPA et al are having. I can't see it being for the greater good myself. It ups the stakes and means that any other sys admin in charge of a University site will now be obliged to call LE in, or risk being charged as conspirators themselves.

(At least, I *presume* it was fear that led to the law enforcement agencies because MIT wasn't to make sure their hands were clean. I wouldn't like to think it was anything pettier, like a way of getting at the LaMacchia family for personal reasons. David's big brother, Brian, is the guy who ran the politically contentious martigny PGP key server. I asked Brian if he thought this attack on David was a way of getting to him indirectly, and he says no. But who knows what's behind people's motivations in this twisted web of intrigue... University politics can get just as nasty as real-life politics...)

Also, I'd like to know *who* drew up the indictment against David - who it was that thought using pgp and anonymous remailers was something worth mentioning. This *isn't* the sort of stuff I'd expect the Boston DA to know about. Either someone at MIT is deliberately shit-stirring or the DA got help from <outside agencies>... my personal suspicion is that that little gem came from MIT and young David is caught up in something larger than his FSP warez server problems... Does anyone have a way of finding out who was responsible for that part? Is it FOIA-able? Or can David's lawyer's expect to be told as part of his defence?

- G

Notes

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