Trump's Double-Edged Sword for Cybersecurity Sector

By **Cat Zakrzewski** |

Donald Trump will inevitably face cyberthreats when he is sworn into the Oval Office. But even after an election dominated by debates like private email servers and the hacking of the Democratic National Committee, his own cybersecurity policies have yet to be articulated.

His promises to invest in infrastructure and national security could be a boon for government spending on the industry. However, Mr. Trump's fearmongering rhetoric on foreign and domestic terrorism during the campaign has heightened concern that the tech sector will be at odds with an expanded surveillance state, including more pressure on companies to cooperate with federal investigators and a requirement of backdoors for the government.

Mr. Trump's own comments on cybersecurity have done little to give tech leaders confidence. In one debate with Hillary Clinton, when asked about how to defend against cyberattacks, the candidate veered off topic and talked about how his 10-year-old son is "good with computers."

During the primaries, Mr. Trump took a hard-line stance in the Apple Inc. encryption debate, calling on the public to boycott the company's products after it refused to help the FBI to decrypt a phone that belonged to one of the San Bernardino shooters. Many in Silicon Valley sided with Apple, but the government ultimately hacked into the phone without the company's assistance, and the debate about corporate cooperation went unresolved.

Ajay Arora, chief executive of the enterprise data security startup Vera, said that although the Obama administration was aggressive on the San Bernardino episode, a Trump administration would likely be even more forceful.

"There will be a lot more pressure on the company or the people in control of the data and devices they want access to," he said.

This is of particular concern, Mr. Arora said, to companies like his that don't enjoy the kind of legal and marketing might that a titan like Apple wields.

Now Silicon Valley is watching as Mr. Trump's team faces a challenge familiar to both the private and public sector—finding and recruiting top minds from the tech community to thwart cyberthreats.

"At the end of the day, it is all about the people that the president surrounds himself with to lead this effort," said Alberto Yepez, Trident Cybersecurity managing director.

Mike Janke, chief executive of the encrypted phone maker Silent Circle, believes that many cybersecurity professionals will join in Mr. Trump's effort.

"We need some young, fresh tech engineers willing to jump into the political snake pit," Mr. Janke said.

Bob Ackerman, managing director of the cybersecurity-focused firm Allegis Capital, said he's optimistic that Mr. Trump will be able to recruit some of the best and brightest talent despite the backlash against him in Silicon Valley.

"It's not all about the Valley," said Mr. Ackerman, "as much as we like to think the sun of innovation rises and sets on our shoulders."