Prying eyes: Keeping your data safe

Even the simplest business possesses data that is proprietary and confidential. Customer and prospects lists, sales data, and personal data about customers such as their credit cards, names, addresses, birth dates. Medical information and social security numbers are commonly collected. If any of this data is compromised, you could face legal and reputational consequences. It is important you stay vigilant in making sure this data is as safe as it can be from cybercriminals.

If you have extremely confidential data, it may be important to use methods to address physical access. Should your server rooms be key-coded or require biometric access? Access codes for physical entry to a room are relatively simple to install. However, passcodes are pretty easy to steal or they can be shared by employees. In addition to limiting access, they can also identify when and who accessed a secure location. One step beyond passcode entry is biometric authentication. Examples of biometric tools are fingerprint, iris or facial recognition. The advantages to these are clear. They cannot be easily stolen and for the user, there is no passcode to remember or a keycard to lose. An MSP can provide guidance about how to go about installing a biometric authentication system to secure specific locations.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is one excellent tool out there that can protect against one of the most common tricks criminals use to get into your data banks. That tool is employee training about phishing emails and fake websites. Phishing emails, the emails that trick you into opening a link that has been corrupted, remain a tried and true method for cybercriminals. What is the best defense? Employee training on how to avoid falling into the trap. The simplest maxim to remember? If in ANY doubt, don't open a link. If there is any reason for suspicion, delete the email and forget about it. Also, look at the email address of the sender. Is it legitimate or is it misspelled or have a few extra characters or numbers that aren't familiar.

What about the usage of passwords? Even if you use biometric tools, somewhere you will likely still be using passwords for some types of access. There are two main areas where you can improve the

security of passwords. One is improving the security of the password itself, the second is multi-factor authentication.

First, there is the password itself. This is often known as password hygiene. Good password hygiene includes

Passwords that are too simple

Simple passwords are easy to remember but easy to crack. Words, in any language, are not ideal either. That is why many sites require a mix of letters, characters, and numbers.

One universal password

Sometimes people find it difficult to remember multiple passwords for various files and applications, so they use a single good, strong password everywhere. This renders the good password virtually pointless and also increases the amount of damage that can be inflicted in the event that one 'good' password is compromised.

Unauthorized password sharing

Generally done with benign intentions, employees often share passwords for convenience or to expedite handling the sharing of data. Not good.

Writing down passwords

Sometimes, people follow all password best practices but find it difficult to remember complicated passwords and then write them down on a piece of paper or worse still, make a file containing all the passwords and store it in their email or computer. This is almost like giving away the keys to your property to a burglar.

Forgetting to change passwords or revoke access

This is especially an issue where the staff is busy and turnover is high. Managers may fail to remember to change the passwords once a staff member quits, leaving company data vulnerable. This is especially likely in a small company where there may not be a centralized IT staff that oversees data security and access.

Remember, having a password is not the solution. Having the right kind of password and following good password hygiene is.

Because passwords can be stolen, hacked or shared and employees or management may balk at the invasiveness of biometrics, there is another tool available. You can make passwords more secure using multi factor authentication (MFA). MFA is pretty simple. It requires a second level of verification to prove that the password is being used by the individual authorized to use it. Examples of MFA are ATM machines that require a card AND a password. MFA very commonly requires the user to submit a code that is sent to another platform. (You've probably encountered this one if you use online banking)

Next, update your software. Immediately. Whenever you get an alert to update anything. Do it then. Don't put it off until tomorrow because this update may have been released to address a recently discovered threat. This is a very simple thing to do and will offer significant protection. Additionally, your Managed Service provider may offer clients a subscription to day zero alerts. These are texts or emails that are sent out whenever a new virus or vulnerability has been discovered.

Among those firms who take risk management seriously, there is a growing awareness of the need to consider some manner of insurance to protect against the costs of cybercrime. When all else fails, and your data has been breached, how can you protect your business financially? Standard commercial property insurance policies do not generally include provisions for the damages from cybercrime. In a growing number of commercial policies, they are specifically excluded. As a result, executives who recognize the catastrophic damage that a cyberattack can inflict on their business are looking at cyber insurance to transfer the financial losses to a third party. However, there are some pretty deep weeds to get into when looking for a cyber insurance policy. Just for one example, some policies may create requirements and security standards you must meet before an event will be considered a covered loss. A Managed Service Provider can offer guidance into whether this is an avenue to explore.

In conclusion, there is a summary of several tools that you can use to protect your data from cybercriminals. They range from the very simple to the highly sophisticated. Your MSP can be of help in adopting any or all of these tools, from providing employee training all the way to biometric solutions.

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