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Gavel to Gavel: Employees play role in data security

By: Diana Tate Vermeire Guest Columnist June 24, 2015 0



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Recent studies indicate that about 30 percent of data breaches result from human error or negligence. Yet many companies overlook a significant security strength, which if not properly addressed can become their greatest point of weakness: their employees. So, what can a business do to help ensure its employees are mindful of their roles in protecting sensitive information?

Step 1: Create companywide data security and protection policies. Such policies and corresponding security protocols should address both electronic and hard-copy data classification, collection, storage, processing and deletion. Companies must involve relevant stakeholders (human resources, information technology, managers and other executives) to ensure an appropriate balance between the necessary level of security and data protection and the firm's need to efficiently and effectively operate. Policies and protocols should employ multiple layers of security and restrict access to sensitive information to only those with a legitimate need to know.

Step 2: Educate and train employees. Employees need to understand their role in protecting sensitive data. This includes education and training on company policies regarding data security and privacy, including Internet usage and malicious email identification. Employees must also understand how to use and protect both work and personal devices, including computers, cellphones, tablets and thumb drives, that access the company's network or information.

Step 3: Audit and test employee adherence to security measures. Even with the best policies and procedures, the most well-intentioned employees can leave companies vulnerable. Security breaches may range from losing unencrypted, or even password protected, portable devices to allowing non-authorized personnel to gain access to an office containing sensitive data. Employees must be regularly reminded of corporate policy and best practices related to data security and privacy to ensure against the human error so often associated with security breaches.

With data breaches, it is not a question of if, but of when. Companies can do a great deal to protect against the inevitable by educating and engaging their employees as a first line of defense.

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