

Protect your firm from all possible threats

By Emmet Ryan

There are threats within, there are threats without, but most companies just want to focus on their core business. A well-managed security strategy can protect a company while allowing it to focus on what it does best.

"Companies need to be protected from internal and external abuse," said Paul Moylett, operations manager with Topsec Technology.

"IT plays a critical role supporting today's business," said Bill O'Brien, Microsoft Ireland's platform strategy manager. "Modern, highly connected IT infrastructure operates in an environment that is increasingly hostile with sophisticated and criminally motivated attacks.

"Managing this infrastructure and protecting the business value they deliver is a primary concern for IT departments.

"In addition, new legislation around privacy, financial obligations and corporate governance are forcing companies to be ever more vigilant in these areas."

Finding the right way to manage these threats requires research, but the time spent

can prove fruitful to a business in the long run.

"A security plan and strategy should be prepared after a risk assessment covering all the threats to the organisations assets," said Gareth Price, security solutions designer with BT Ireland.

"A risk-based approach will ensure that the business gets the most benefit from the finite resources available. Once you have assessed your risks and produced a security plan identifying the required extra controls, you can produce a strategy to implement them."

Companies need to identify what areas are the highest priority to their business. They need to find which sectors require more complex work and how best to monitor their security systems.

Working out a company's needs can be difficult for those without a technological background. Many businesses work with third parties and allow them to manage their security systems.

"Developing a security strategy is a potentially daunting task, especially for business with limited resources, but it needn't be," said O'Brien. "Plenty of excellent guidance exists in this area."

"Sometimes it's better to have an external company looking after it," said Moylett.

"It's like dealing with a solicitor or accountant. It's the core business of the provider and this is important as the client needs to focus on their business and not worry about security."

Many companies have moved their entire IT infrastructure into data centres in order to restrict physical access to the network.

"The servers are locked in cages," said Moylett. "The company controls access, so someone can't just walk in and stick in a disk."

Third parties can also monitor and restrict staff e-mails at a client's request. This can prevent large amounts of confidential data being sent outside the network.

Companies face more threats than ever before to their IT structures. Many still focus solely on using in-house IT staff to manage the security systems despite these dangers.

"A lot of management put a lot of faith in IT staff," said Moylett. "We are seeing more and more outsourcing for a reason. IT managers can't be all things to all men."

Personnel problems with IT

managers could also lead to problems for companies down the line.

"If there's a dispute, they could take information with them or leave a back door into the network open," said Moylett.

Companies need to ensure that controls are in place to protect themselves, should someone leave the business.

"At a minimum, the business must ensure that when a person leaves the company, they are blocked from accessing any buildings and IT systems," said Price.

Human resources issues can be avoided, if managed well. Likewise, the threat posed by potential loss of company information to viruses and spam can also be avoided if a well-managed strategy is in place.

"A lot of companies don't realise how exposed they are," said Moylett. "They run the risk of crashing their whole system and effectively putting themselves out of business."

Companies need to make sure they have enough protection to guard against these threats. Consulting with IT advisors can be the first step on the way to developing an adequate strategy.

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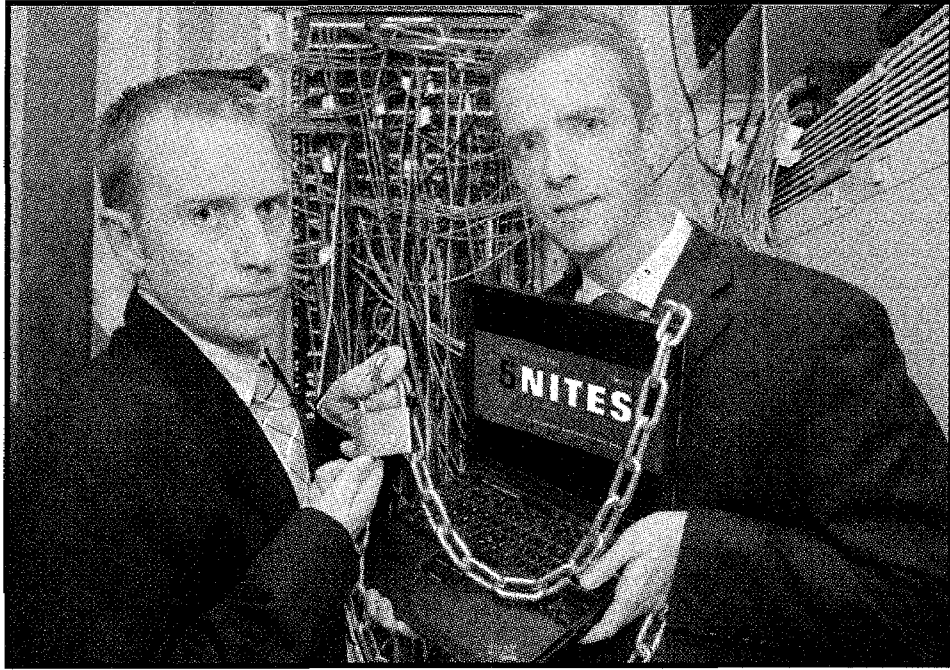
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Jason Guy, IT security consultant, IBM Global Technology, and Bill O'Brien, platform strategy manager, Microsoft Ireland, at the launch of the fifth Sunday Business Post NITES conference