Users are crucial to computer security

IN MY OPINION

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An educated user is the first line of defence for any organization's information system.

Users who don't understand and support the need for security usually feel it is just another obstacle to getting the job done.

These people will nearly always find ways to circumvent security controls. A high-risk environment is created when the controls that are expected to be effective and operating are being subverted.

Let's look at an organization that has made its employees accountable for all activity when they log in using their user IDs.

Each time users sign on to their computer account they are presented with the last log-in date and time. If the last session indicated is incorrect, the user is expected to follow the notification procedures and alert the appropriate authorities.

Without notification procedures, the unauthorized activity could go undetected for months.

If and when it is detected, there is no assurance that the system administrator will be able to determine how long it has been occurring. This substantially increases the risk to the organization.

Another security responsibility that should be assigned to users is the review of the number of invalid log-in attempts. With this responsibility the user is expected to notify the appropriate personnel when they discover invalid log-in attempts that were not caused by themselves through typing or other kinds of errors.

If users are not given this responsibility, security officers may incorrectly assume that authorized users are having difficulty typing their password, when in fact an unauthorized user is attempting to break into the system. Consequently the situation may not be given the attention it requires.

To ensure users do pay attention to invalid log-in attempts, it is important that they understand how hackers operate. A security awareness program should discuss how intruders gain access and what the consequences might be to the organization, and what each individual can do to help prevent a hacker from gaining access.

Items that should be included are hacker dictionaries and how to choose passwords that are not easy to guess but easy to remember.

An information security awareness program is the only effective tool for keeping all levels of an organization informed of the requirement for best practices around information security.

Unfortunately, in many organizations, the security effort stops after the implementation of security products and procedures. This is ineffective because it ignores the most important factor — the human component.

An effective security awareness program educates employees in industry-specific risks as well as generic business risks. A high-technology corporation, for example, may have serious concerns regarding industry espionage. As such, it needs to ensure that its employees are well versed in "social engineering" hacking. This is when an intruder poses as a person of authority to gain access to confidential information.

Organizations in the high-technology sector may also be concerned with physical security and therefore might require employees to wear a visible name tag and access pass. This will further heighten their security awareness.

The primary objective of an information security awareness program is to reduce the risk.

This means ensuring all those with access to an information system play an active role in early detection of unauthorized users.

Educating users about security risks will translate into large savings for an organization, but security is the responsibility of everyone in an organization — not just senior management.

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New MB boss has good record

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and packaging products, and Shuller, building products. These are also first moves will be to sell off one of its divisions.

Credit card bears word of warning

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