

Secure Your Database from Information Leaks

Today I'd like to address a subject that is near and dear to every business owner – keeping the heart of the business safe from intrusion. Door locks, alarms, and cameras can help safeguard your physical facilities and equipment. But in the modern age, the most critical information to your business – all the financial, technical, marketing and personnel information -- is maintained in electronic form in computer databases. Loss or harm to this information can destroy a whole business overnight.

It may be easy to assume that Internet firewalls and PC passwords are enough to prevent unauthorized access. But according to Fredric Paul, publisher and editor-in-chief of bMighty.com, an online resource that specializes in the IT needs of small and medium-sized businesses, database breaches from both external and internal sources are increasing at an alarming rate.

“Small businesses face a higher risk because they usually lack the IT security infrastructure and expertise of larger, but no less vulnerable, corporations,” Paul explains. “Because small businesses also lack the resources and expertise to detect and respond quickly to a breach, the consequences of unauthorized access are greater as well.”

Here are some steps that SCORE recommends for keeping your small business databases as safe as possible:

Enable security capabilities. Many off-the-shelf databases have only limited default security controls. Make sure that all authentication controls are enabled, and avoid using common passwords for user and administrator accounts.

Give the database a security check-up. Before entering any data, make sure no unwanted or unnecessary sharing features are activated by default. Check the software developer's website every few months to ensure that your version is up-to-date with all the latest security patches.

Restrict database access. Even if you have a small, trusted staff, access to the database should be limited to a need-to-know basis. This will prevent passwords and other important information from being misused or unintentionally shared. It also provides an extra measure of safety in the event today's colleague becomes tomorrow's competitor.

Make regular backups. Depending on the size and extent of your small business databases, back-up copies should be made on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis. The data should be stored in encrypted format to further minimize its value to a data thief. Keep back-up databases at a secure, off-site location in the event your normal place of business becomes inaccessible due to weather, fire, or natural disaster.

Keep track of trends. Even if you don't consider yourself a computer whiz, safeguarding IT resources is easier when you take a proactive approach. Resources such as bMighty.com can provide valuable information and tips for ensuring your system stays in step with your small business's needs.

To learn more about safeguarding your small business's physical and electronic assets, contact SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business." SCORE is a nationwide nonprofit association of experienced business people who provide free and confidential business counseling to small business owners. The Sandhills Chapter is very active in counseling, mentoring and presenting free business seminars. If you wish to speak to SCORE counselors about your business, please register as a client by entering your information at www.edmisscore.org/0364 and one of our counselors will contact you.

In addition to counseling by appointment, the Sandhills chapter of SCORE has members available for drop-in service for those who have registered on www.edmisscore.org/0364, from 10am to noon Tuesdays and Fridays at the Moore County Chamber of Commerce building on Hwy 15/501 in Southern Pines. The phone number there is 910-692-3936.

The local SCORE Chapter is always seeking motivated volunteers. More information on SCORE's counseling activity and a complete description of each seminar can be found at the Sandhills SCORE website, www.sandhillsscore.org.