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Time Matters 5.0



BEATING THE BUG ON A BUDGET

Small Firms Can Find Low-Cost Means to Fight Computer Viruses

BY ANDY GRIESER

Corporate technology departments are accustomed to dealing with dangerous computer viruses. But consider the solo attorney who can't afford the extra staff. Ben Sherwood, privacy adviser for Sherwood Personal Security in Oak Brook, Ill., recalls one such client of his. The attorney relied on income from one large client. When the lawyer accidentally passed on the Klez virus—and infected the client's entire network—he faced the search for a new source of income, not to mention the cost of disinfecting his own computer.

Avoiding viruses up front can cut those costs dramatically.

"Firms should constantly back data up and store it remotely," says David Jones, an associate at the Memphis headquarters of Siskind Susser Haas & Devine. Jones handles his 18-lawyer firm's information technology needs.

"We receive hundreds of e-mails every day," he says. "Large numbers of them contain viruses. As such, it is imperative that we have the anti-virus software. The firewall also is extremely important in virus prevention. We run the Windows 2000 small-business server and use Computer Associates for anti-virus and backup."

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That may sound complicated and expensive to the small-firm manager or solo practitioner, and to be sure, Jones estimates the cost for both server and setup at about \$10,000. But that price varies by brand. Hiring a security firm can run at least \$1,200, but a home office can be secured for as little as \$600, says Ben Sherwood.

"The proactive firm will always save the most time, money and hardship," Sherwood says. "Putting in an effective security system and policy for a small firm or solo is relatively inexpensive. It's when they call after they've been hit that the bills really start to pile up."

The golden rule is regular backup of all vital data. This commonsense approach extends to software and e-mail.

Be wary of e-mail with attachments, especially from an unknown party, experts warn. Also, they say, be cognizant of major viruses, both through news services and regular alerts sent by the makers of virus-scan software. And always be sure your virus-scan software is updated at least weekly, if not daily.

"With respect to e-mail, most Internet-savvy people employ anti-virus software that has the capacity to, and is set to, examine all incoming e-mail and attachments, quarantine potentially infected files and then sanitize them and return them to use or determine that they cannot be sanitized and hold them in isolation pending further disposition," says Jeffrey Allen, a principal at Graves & Allen in Oakland, Calif. Allen is an editor of the Technology & Practice Guide published by the ABA's General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Section.

Windows users are particularly at risk, Allen says. Most businesses run on Windows, which makes the operating system a more tempting target for virus propagators.

"Individuals who like to create viruses get more bang for their effort on the Windows platform," he says.

"Most firms think that buying a piece of software will keep them safe. They're wrong," Sherwood says. "I always tell them I charge less than they do an hour, so it makes no sense to have them waste their time."

Jones recommends regular monitoring of e-mail and server status. He says there's no such thing as doing it too often—in fact, he gets security reports on his own systems throughout the day.

And what if it's too late, and your firm is already infected? Don't panic. Call in the pros.

"If a small firm suspects that it has been infected, I'd recommend

unplugging the Internet connection and contacting a security professional," Sherwood says. "They'll be able to identify the issue and walk you through the proper steps. Sometimes, powering down a system can increase the level of damage.

"When working for yourself or at a small firm, having your computers go down for even one day can cripple a business. Security is the last thing you want to take a chance with."

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