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Ultimate Threat Machines

I am old enough to remember the good ole days when we didn't spend so much time on security issues and created applications that helped companies become more productive. As a programmer, the goal is to make someone's job easier by creating applications that speed up work flow and provide easy methods of retrieving the data. That still is the goal but of late it gets bogged down by installing and configuring utilities to prevent hackers from getting to your data.

More than ever, security has become one of the largest issues we all face. Whether it is at the airport or on your computer. Can you ignore this on going fight of someone trying to break into or destroy your system? No way. The statistics on a home PC connected to a DSL or cable line is that within 15 minutes an unprotected computer will be hacked. Why so fast? You may think that an actual individual has to manually attempt to break-in. It was that way, but hackers quickly learned to have the computer do the work for them.

A common method currently used is once the hacker has broken into a system they use that system to locate other systems that can be hacked. The 2nd computer is now used to find other computers. You can visualize how quickly this kind of technique can increase the suc-

cess of finding computers that they can use. What do they use them for? Sending spam is a very common usage. Spam has increased in the last several months. Another usage is to download movies or music to your computer and let the community of hackers know where they can get the illegal content. They also attempt to find any confidential info, such as bank accounts, credit card, etc. You may not notice or be aware of any of this activity.

There is also malware that will destroy your system by deleting or corrupting files. This, of course, you will notice. The methods that hackers use are constantly changing and improving from the hackers point of view.

So how do you protect your systems? We all are aware of anti-virus, anti-spyware, spam protection and firewalls. Currently all of these applications must be in place and kept up-to-date for some level of protection. Strong passwords are also a must.

There are several companies working on new widgets labeled as Ultimate Threat Machines (UTM). The theory behind these developments is to have one appliance or box do the work of all the required security methods. These units are the first thing between your Internet connection and

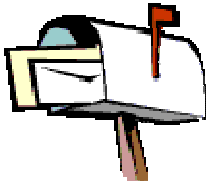
your internal network.

As these are relatively new products, the big question is which product does the best job for the lowest cost? There is not an easy answer for this. We have been researching all of the products to try and determine what works and what is just hype. Of course every manufacturer states their product is the best.

They are not easy products to test. To really test you need to think like a hacker and try to break through the UTM. Not an easy task. Another way to evaluate is to rely on independent reviews of the products. We have found some reviews, but in every case the reviews only cover a few of the products making it difficult to compare. There is also the consideration of how good is the reviewer or do they have a bias.

There are arguments against this all-in-one device. Is it better to have separate devices doing each task? Our judgment is individual devices result in high costs and probably won't operate efficiently as an all-in-one. The other benefit is having only one device to configure.

Very soon we plan to make a determination as to the UTM that we will recommend to our customers. Will this ulti-



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mately solve the problem? Probably not, but it would be an improvement. Fighting the hackers is just like fighting terrorists. You can't easily find or detect them. They find you. Bottom line, security issues are going to be an important issue for some time.

Email Tips

Unclear or No Subject Headings

Make sure you always include a clear subject heading. Some spam processors will consider email with no subject as spam. In order to assist your reader, a clear subject line helps the reader siphon through their email. A poorly worded subject line can result in the reader skipping over your email.

Don't Reply if New Subject Matter

If you are sending email about a new subject, don't reply using an old email message with the old subject. It only confuses the reader when the subject topic doesn't match the body of the email.

Unprofessional Salutations

For people you know well, it's OK to skip a formal salutation because email is more like an ongoing conversation. However, when writing an email to an executive or customer, it is best not to start it out with "Yo!" or "Howdy." If you have some familiarity with the recipient, using "Dear Bob" is not a bad idea, but don't go with "Dear Bobby" unless you know using the diminutive won't rankle that person. If you don't know the person at all, go with Mr. or Ms. and their last name. Personalize your salutations and people will respond more positively.

Incessant Babbling

It is best to write the most important information at the beginning of the email. This will grab and most likely keep the recipient's attention. If you find yourself writing a book, create a separate document as an attachment and just use the email as an introduction to that document. Simply get to the point.

Confusing Responses

If the original email you wrote had a list of questions, it is very frustrating to receive a bunch of answers back without your original appended. To be clear about which question is being answered, it is better to include your answers right under each corresponding question.

Cutesy Formatting

There is nothing more distracting than getting an email with pink background wall paper and gyrating smiley icons. It's also important to remember that everyone uses email that interprets HTML, so even your bolds and italics will not display as expected. Your recipient may turn off HTML for security, others may have plain text PDAs, while some may just be using old email software.

When, Where, Huh?

Writing "Th @ 2, my office" can cause problems. Did you mean this coming Thursday or Thursday next week? Best to include all the details such as "Thursday, July 14, 2005 from 1 pm to 4 pm in my office." If you are in a different time zone, specific the time zone.

Inane Responses

Did you ever put lots of thought and effort into an email, only to receive the response "You bet" or

"Sure"? Take the time to sufficiently acknowledge the senders questions or issues.

Standard Signatures

Email signatures can be a form of marketing for the company. Use the auto-signature feature to include a standard signature format created by your company. At a minimum include full name, title, company name and office phone number. If they require more details they can always ask for fax, address, etc. A company slogan at the bottom, such as "Making Wireless Healthcare Happen," helps brand the company. Consistent signatures will show your company is in sync and well-

Managed Services

For the last several months, the hot item that has been tossed around is Manager Services. Companies that provide this service have been trying to convince companies like us to promote this service to you, the end user.

What is included in Managed Services varies in scope depending on the service. The most common features are remote monitoring of a network and equipment status. The concept being that your network or equipment is constantly being monitored for potential problems. Early warnings are sent to the monitoring operation and they, in turn, notify the designated contact of the problem.

For example, there could be abnormal network traffic or a flaky network card that would trigger a problem. Many times this type of problem is not discovered until something permanently breaks. By having an early warning method, the problem can be resolved before any downtime occurs.

This sounds great on paper. We have been and will continue to research this type of service. So far we have not found a service that we feel could be justified in its use.

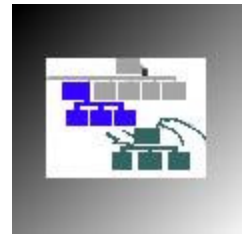
One of the big problems is price. Most of the services require a base monthly fee that averages about \$500 a month. Each machine that is monitored is charged an additional fee, servers at about \$200 to \$500 a month and workstations around \$30 a month. Our feeling is that the costs don't justify the benefits.

Another problem is that the services don't always work as they are promoted. Resulting in you paying for services that you don't get. Of course, you are not aware that the monitoring system is not working well until a failure occurs that is not fore warned.

Several companies have jumped on this band wagon and since have gone out of business. Resulting in you paying for services that you never will receive.

On the upside, Intel is introducing a new technology called vPro. Machines that have vPro technology can be remotely supported down to the Bios level. This feature would allow us to troubleshoot problems remotely, providing faster service in fixing your problems. There are no extra fees that have to be paid for this feature. Most machines made in the near future will have this technology built-in.

Eventually Managed Services will be a viable idea and costs will get lower. We are always looking for better and more efficient methods to provide to our customers. We will keep researching Managed Services and advise you when we find one that is worth recommending and actually provides a valued benefit.



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Trivia

Only 14% of Americans say they've done this with the opposite sex. What is it? - *Skinny dipping.*

What separates "60 Minutes," on CBS, from every other TV show? - *No theme song/music.*

Half of all Americans live within 50 miles of what? - *Their birthplace.*

What do 100% of all lottery winners do? - *Gain weight.*

In a recent survey, Americans revealed that this was their favorite smell.—*Banana.*

This stimulates 29 muscles and chemicals causing relaxation. Women seem to like it light and frequent, men like it more strenuous.—*A kiss.*

There are more collect calls on this day than any other day of the year.—*Father's Day.*

What trivia fact about Mel Blanc (voice of Bugs Bunny) is most ironic? - *He was allergic to carrots.*

3.9% of all women surveyed say they never do this. - *Wear underwear.*

What person, not a "Seinfeld" regular cast member, was featured on every episode of "Seinfeld"? - *Superman, either by name or pictures on Jerry's refrigerator.*

