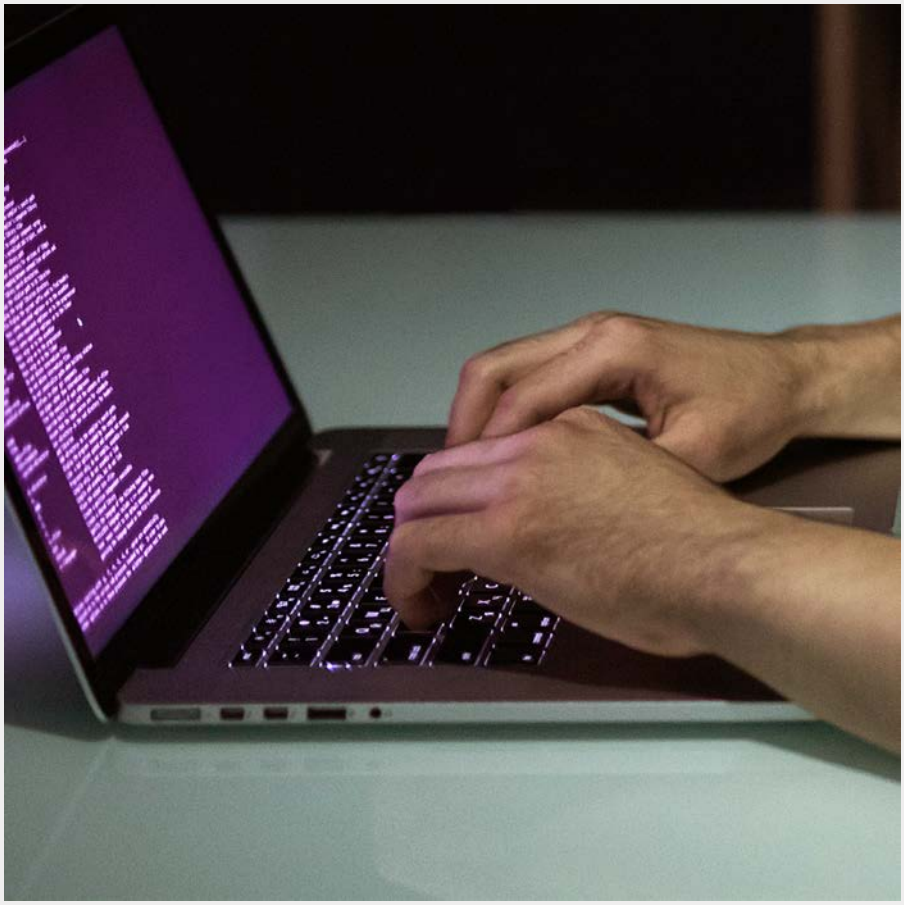
Risk control

Cyber Attacks



Introduction

In March 2018 a ransom-ware attack locked out the City of Atlanta's municipal government staff from their computer systems. This attack was described as one of the most sustained and consequential cyber-attacks ever mounted against a major American city administration *(Weise, 2018)*.

Ransom-ware is a type of malicious software developed by those with criminal intent. If downloaded into IT systems, the software is programmed to lock a target's computer or network, blocking access to important systems and data. The threat usually contained within ransom-ware attacks is that the locked information will be irrevocably damaged or destroyed if the demand is not met within a prescribed timeframe.

Ransom-ware demands tend to be relatively small in comparison to the financial standing of the target organisation. For example, the sum involved in the Atlanta attack was reported to be $51,000 (*O'Donnell, L. 2018).*

The Target

A 2016 survey of Chief Information Officers in the USA found that obtaining ransoms was the primary motivation for nearly one third of all attacks on a city or county government. Fewer than half of the local governments surveyed reported a formal cyber-security policy was in place. (*ICMA, 2018)*

Specific targets for this new wave of ransom attack are large public service providers such as universities, hospitals and police departments; organisations that have large incomes, but no scope for going off-line for days or weeks to invoke structured IT disaster recovery procedures.

But the major significance of ransom attacks in the public sector is the immediate disruption caused to municipal services as residents may not be able to access important information, pay taxes, fees, or fines online, report potholes or make complaints via the organisation's website. The financial consequences of a cyber-attack can be far greater than the ransom demand.

Summary

Events such as these serve as reminders of the importance of the need to robustly protect our organisations from the continuing threat posed by the methods of modern-day criminality.

Based on Freedom of Information requests, Big Brother Watch found that UK local authorities have experienced in excess of 98 million cyber-attacks over five years. At least one in four councils experienced some form of cyber security breach between 2013 and 2017 *(Big Brother watch, 2018)*

Local authorities will be required to report breaches of the rights and freedoms of individuals to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) under the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Further Information

Gallagher Bassett has a partnership arrangement with Broadgate Consultants for the provision of a Cyber Risk Health Check. This service falls outside of the elective day's arrangement and there is a fee payable for this service. The Health Check provides clients with a brief review of their current cyber protection levels and provides them with recommendations to strengthen their cyber resilience. The Health check itself will be a blend of meetings, an online assessment, a review of existing documentation and a final report presentation.

References

- USA Today. 2018. *Atlanta hit by ransomware attack, city employees told not to turn on computers*. [ONLINE]. Available at:

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- O'Donnell, L. (2018). *Ransomware Attack Cripples Several Atlanta City Systems*. [online] Threatpost | The first stop for security news. Available at:

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- Cyber attacks in local authorities. (2018). [ebook] Big Brother Watch. Available at:

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  [Accessed 16 April 2018]

Further RMP Resources and Articles

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page. Additionally we have specific discussion groups for the Education, Emergency and Government sectors.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your Broker, RMP risk control consultant or RMP account director.

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Overview

Data and information systems are constantly under threat of a cyber-attack or data security breach. Such events could result in the loss of sensitive data, loss of data integrity or damage to the IT infrastructure and its systems, with significant consequences for your organisation's reputation and day to day business operations. With the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in May 2018, companies can now face a maximum fine of 4% of company turnover in the event of a breach, and the pressure to report a breach within 72 hours of discovery.

Public sector organisations are particularly at risk as they tend to hold far more data than the private sector and this information is often our most personal details stored on older more vulnerable systems. The impact of cyber criminals accessing public sector information can have far reaching consequences affecting the delivery and continuity of crucial public services. It is a case of when, not if, a breach will happen. Although it is not possible to totally eliminate cyber risk there are steps that you can take to protect your financial assets, your personal data and your reputation. A cyber risk assessment will help you to define the information that you need to protect and identify any vulnerable areas that need attention. By addressing the issues, highlighting the risks and putting mitigating steps in place your organisation can be confident that when a breach occurs you can deal with the consequences quickly and effectively limiting any damage.

Objectives

The assessment will enable your organisation to identify information security weaknesses in your IT infrastructure, systems, policy and procedure. The weaknesses will be documented and remedial actions and methods proposed to eliminate or significantly reduce the threat or breach.

Methodology

Building from your Cyber Essentials baseline we will help you to identify and resolve other key areas of your risk exposure such as data protection and supplier assurance. The assessment will include the following steps:

- A short survey of questions to be completed using the Broadgate online assessment portal.
- Review of the survey once it has been completed and follow this up with any queries.

Following the review a report will be produced highlighting any risk areas for concern with recommendations for remedial action. The risks will be detailed in terms of likelihood and impact, and recommendations categorised into "quick wins" and longer term.

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