

Defending your data castle

Are there enough layers to keep hackers at bay?

Back when castles were surrounded by high walls, portcullises, and moats with drawbridges, people had already discovered that the best security comes in layers. If the enemy gets past the first barrier, another hurdle immediately confronts them. Fast-forward to the Internet age and layered security is once again proving to be the only practical way to protect your valuables – in this case, your data.

There are so many variables surrounding the securing and sharing of information, it's no wonder hackers are having so much success illicitly accessing company data. They need only find one small opening, usually provided inadvertently by one careless user, and your valuable data is at risk.

Hackers are getting more creative and organized by the day, so your first question should be: "Am I meeting that challenge by also getting more creative and organized in defending my data?"

If the answer is no, it's easy to predict who will get the data, the castle, and the loot. (Hint: It's not you.)

It used to be that malicious code was created by geeks looking for peer recognition – digital graffiti artists, if you like. No more. These guys are now highly organized and skilled at staying under the radar. The last thing they want is to be noticed. They want to quietly and patiently watch and wait for the moment the user drops his or her guard. They strike ... and they are gone. You won't even know they've been there – that is, until your customers start complaining about spam or you experience employee or customer identity theft.

If you don't think you have a problem, beware. You may not even know you have a problem.

It is no secret that hackers have been working to get around your data security since the day it was installed. So if you thought that simply having a firewall or an anti-virus pro-



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gram was enough to protect you, you're in for a shock. You need more than just a tool here and a tool there. You need that progression of defensive layers around your data castle. You need a plan, a methodology, a process, a training program, policies – and then you need to merge all of that with the right tools to secure the right resources in the right manner.

You can't build a castle on sand (at least one that won't wash away), so don't build your data security on guesswork. Start with a plan

and some sort of methodology. The methodology includes the common threads that hold the layers together and establishes the interdependencies between the layers. This is critical to the concept of layered security because you need to ensure that if one layer fails, another layer is ready to step up and face the enemy.

Create a security policy to give your layered security solution a framework. If you are thinking "I don't have time for this," the reality is that you don't have time not to create and maintain a security policy. It is the glue that holds all the other layers together. There are great resources available, like www.sans.org, to help you get started.

Because the threats are so diverse, there will always be people who say "you left this or that out," or "you have these layers backwards." But the goal here is not to tell you exactly what to do or buy, but rather to give you the concept, information and tools to help you make the right decisions for your company.

The model I have created currently has ten layers, and more are being added as the threats change and grow. In the coming months, we'll examine each layer in detail and contemplate the many aspects you need to consider as you implement each layer.

As this picture develops, you'll see how each layer depends on others and how their interrelationships build a solid wall around your valuable assets. Stay tuned – and stay safe. ■