

## Cutting costs in IT security is a bad policy

Business IT security is a perennially favourite topic of discussion, writes Robert May, managing director of ramsac.

From SMEs to multi-national corporations (and even in government circles), the security of IT systems is much discussed and yet there is a feeling that maybe it is not always given the consideration it deserves. At a recent conference, CompTIA CEO Todd Thibodeaux suggested that it would be sensible to allocate 10% of a company's IT budget to providing security, and yet the evidence suggests that in reality this is often not the case. For example, a Gartner survey recently found that the industry average spend on IT security is only about five percent. Perhaps even more startling is a report by the Ponemon Institute, Cenxic and Barracuda Networks which found that 88% of companies surveyed indicate they spend more on coffee than they do on securing Web applications.

In my experience this isn't unusual. If we took a poll across a cross section of small businesses I suspect many would say they either don't have a specific budgetary allocation for IT security or that it is a minimal amount. So why is there a shortfall between the professionally suggested levels and the reality of IT security within the business world?

Having spoken to and worked with countless IT managers and business owners the anecdotal evidence is that providing IT security is, to many, a task with somewhat intangible bene-

fits. Like buying insurance, investing in IT security doesn't give an immediate, visible, business benefit in the same way that purchasing a smartphone or company car does. In fact, very much like insurance, it's a purchase that will only really remind you of its worth when disaster strikes - and then it will also make it very evident whether you have bought the right or wrong product for your needs.

While failing to find the right level of protection could potentially leave your business open to serious problems, paying over the odds for products you don't need makes equally bad business sense. So like most business decisions, finding the right balance is vital. The suggested 10% of budget may be a good guide, but naturally all organisations are different and the appropriate amount will vary depending on a wide range of factors, including the type of business and the potential threats to it.

When considering IT security for a business it is vital to understand the types of threats that could be a problem and the weak points in the organisation that leave it vulnerable. For companies that run an online ordering or sales system this could mean a specific threat to customer's account or financial details by IT-savvy criminals. Most businesses hold personal details on their systems and there is a potential risk that these can be hacked remotely without proper protection being in place. At the most basic level, all businesses are open to threats via email