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 Date: 04/08/2004
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SME Business News

Wednesday, August 04, 2004

NT withdrawal threatens SMEs, warns Ramsac

IT solutions provider Ramsac is warning SMEs to consider the security implications of Microsoft's decision to pull the plug on its NT operating system. From January 1st 2005, the company will stop issuing vital security patches and software updates for the popular business platform.

According to research, nearly 80 percent of UK companies are using Windows NT within their infrastructure, many as their main operating system. Robert May, RAMSAC's managing director, believes this will leave hundreds of thousands of users, many of them SMEs, at serious risk from new viruses, attacks from malicious hackers and conflicts with next generation software.

"Few companies can afford to have unsupported software underpinning their entire IT infrastructure," says May. "Microsoft's decision effectively forces firms to upgrade while leaving IT systems at short term risk from security threats and other IT issues."

May cites last month's Microsoft security update - regarding the Internet Explorer web browser which was found to be at risk from a malicious bug that gave remote computers control over infected machines - as an example of potential problems to come. Microsoft classed the security patch for this problem as 'critical' (the highest level) and urged all users of its MS operating systems, including NT, to download the patch immediately.

"From New Year's Day next year, NT users will be left wide open to these sorts of attack," May says. "Despite the risks, many companies including SMEs will be forced to keep running NT because of the costs involved in moving to a new system. These businesses need advice on what steps they can take to keep IT systems safe and reliable while they plan a move to a more up-to-date platform, which in the majority of cases will be Windows Server 2003 and Windows XP Pro."

While May isn't critical of Microsoft's decision to withdraw NT - having given plenty of warning about its decision - he believes that companies are in no way prepared for the technology upheaval. Many senior decision makers have taken the stance of continuing to use NT as they feel it works well without understanding the business risks.

"We don't blame Microsoft for wanting to move customers on from older products," adds May. "But RAMSAC believes that many companies have not made provision within their IT strategy and are currently unaware of the impending potential problems."

RAMSAC is offering a free 'NT-Audit' to companies currently running the software.

The shelving of NT began back in 2002 when Windows NT Server 4.0 was withdrawn for sale through partners with direct sales following in 2003. From January 1st 2005, all effective support for the product will be withdrawn, though users who purchased updates (called service packs) will still be offered limited help according to the terms of their software license.

www.ramsac.com



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