TECHNOLOGY TIMES

INSIDER TIPS TO MAKE YOUR BUSINESS RUN FASTER, EASIER AND MORE PROFITABLY SINCE 2003

Hackers Are Targeting Small Construction Companies & Other Invoice-Heavy Businesses

From 2023 to 2024, attacks on construction companies doubled, making up 6% of Kroll's total incident response cases, according to the 2024 Cyber Threat Landscape report from risk-advisory firm Kroll. Experts at Kroll note that the uptick could be driven by how work is carried out in the industry: employees work with numerous vendors, work remotely via mobile devices and operate in high-pressure environments where urgency can sometimes trump security protocols. All of these factors make the construction industry ripe for a cyber-attack.

Ripe For Hackers

Business e-mail compromise (BEC) – fake e-mails designed to trick employees into giving away money or sensitive information – made up 76% of attacks on construction companies, according to Kroll. These e-mails look like document-signing platforms or invoices to socially engineer users into giving away information.

These tactics are having a higher success rate in smaller construction companies for a few reasons:

- **They deal with a lot of suppliers and vendors.** Construction companies work with *many* suppliers and vendors, and each vendor can be a weak spot that hackers can exploit. For example, if a hacker gets control of a vendor's e-mail, they can send fake invoices that look real, tricking businesses into sending money to the hacker's account instead. Multiply that by the number of vendors you work with, and that's a lot of potential entry points for a hacker.
- **They use frequent mobile sign-ins.** As truly remote workers, construction employees rely on mobile devices to sign into accounts and communicate from anywhere. This mobile accessibility, while convenient, also increases the risk because mobile devices are typically less secure than desktops or laptops.
- **They work in a high-stakes, high-pressure environment.** In

Continued on pg.2

September 2024

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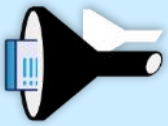

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This monthly publication provided courtesy of David Luft, CEO of LDD Consulting, Inc.

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industries where delays can be costly, such as construction or healthcare, employees may rush to process invoices or approve transactions without thoroughly verifying their legitimacy. This urgency is *precisely* what attackers count on to get around standard security checks.

Your Industry Could Be Next

Construction companies are not the only ones experiencing more attacks. Small manufacturing companies, higher education institutions and healthcare providers that lack the robust security infrastructure of larger industry players are also examples of industries seeing a rise in cyber-attacks. These industries, like construction, deal with numerous vendors and urgent invoices, making them prime targets for business e-mail compromise and invoice fraud.

> "Accounts that use MFA are 99% less likely to be attacked, according to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency."

How To Protect Against BEC and Invoice Fraud

1. **Use Multifactor Authentication (MFA)**

   Accounts that use MFA are 99% less likely to be attacked, according to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. MFA requires multiple forms of verification before granting access to sensitive information. Even if hackers obtain log-in details, they can't access accounts without the second credential, typically a mobile device or a biometric scan.

2. **Always Verify Supplier Information**

   One of the simplest yet most effective measures is to verify the authenticity of invoices and supplier information. Establish a protocol where employees are required to double-check the details of any financial transaction directly with the supplier through a known and trusted communication channel, such as a phone call.

3. **Keep Employees Trained On Common Attacks**

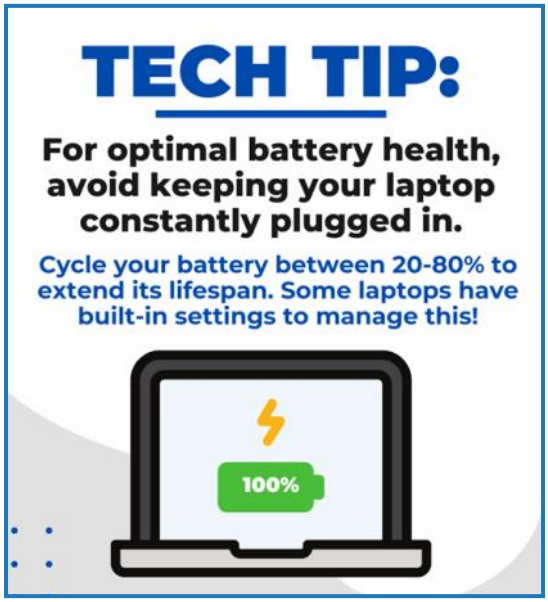
   Employee training is a vital component of a comprehensive cyber security strategy. Regular training sessions on recognizing social engineering and phishing attempts and understanding the importance of following verification protocols can empower employees to act as the first line of defense. The Information Systems Audit and Control Association recommends cyber security awareness training every four to six months. After six months, employees start to forget what they have learned.

4. **Maintain Strong Cyber Security Practices**

   Cybercriminals regularly exploit outdated software to gain entry into systems. Small businesses can close these security gaps by keeping software up to date. Investing in robust antivirus and anti-malware solutions can help detect and stop attacks before they get into your systems.

You're A Target, But You Don't Need To Be A Victim

Hackers are increasingly targeting small, invoice-heavy industries like construction, manufacturing and health care due to their inherent vulnerabilities. By understanding the reasons behind these attacks and implementing robust cyber security measures, small business leaders can protect their organizations from becoming easy targets. Utilizing MFA, maintaining strong cyber security practices, verifying supplier information and training employees are essential to stopping attacks.



DONALD MILLER

EXPLAINS HOW TO TALK ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS SO CUSTOMERS WILL LISTEN

It's really, *really* hard to grab people's attention today. Customers are busy and inundated with choices, making it hard for businesses to stand out. Donald Miller empathizes. He knew people loved his book *Building A StoryBrand* – after all, he sold millions of copies. But when Miller decided to tour and fill 700 theater seats for a speaking engagement, half remained empty. "I learned that I'm good at writing the 300 pages but not very good at writing the sentence that makes you want to read the 300 pages. It's two different skill sets," Miller explained to business leaders at a recent industry conference.

Do you know how to communicate the value of your products or services so customers buy again and again? Most of us don't. That's because we prioritize creativity and cleverness over clarity. Miller argues that no dollar spent on branding, color palettes, logos or website redesigns will help if you aren't clear about your message. Why? Because human brains are hardwired for two things:

1. **Survive and Thrive**
2. **Conserve Calories**

We don't have time or energy to process unnecessary information; we only buy what helps us get ahead. "If you confuse people about how you can help them survive, you'll lose," Miller says.

Tell A Story

"The first thing we have to understand is that people buy products only after reading words or hearing words that make them want to bother to buy those products," Miller explains.

Let's say you meet two people at a cocktail party who do the same thing for a living. You ask person A, "What do you do?" They say, "I'm an at-home chef." So, you ask questions about where they went to school, their favorite recipes, etc. Then, you meet person B and ask the same thing. They respond, "You know how most families don't eat together anymore? And when they do, they don't eat healthy? I'm an at-home chef."

Who does more business? Person B, because they told a story about how they solved a problem. Humans love stories; it's why we binge-watch good television. Good stories have the same core structure, and Miller explains how you can use it to tell the story of why your business is the one customers should choose.

1. Identify your hero's (customer's) problem and talk about it *a lot*. When someone asks, "What do you do?" don't tell them. Start by describing the problem. Spend 75% of your time talking about your customer's problem because that triggers the purchase.

2. Introduce them to the guide (you). The key to being a guide is to listen: "*I'm sorry you're going through that. It sounds very stressful.*" Then, be competent: "*I feel your pain, and I know how to get you out of this hole*."

3. Give them a plan. This is an active call to action, like "Buy now" or "Schedule a call." You must challenge the hero to take the action that leads to success.

Remember, the story you're telling is not about you. It's about your customer, the hero. Once you have your message, distill it into short, simple and repeatable sound bites. "It works every single time," Miller says, "because the human brain cannot ignore a story."

Client Spotlight

Get Rid of Your IT Headaches… Choose LDD

Our biggest advantage since moving to LDD is a problem-free network system. LDD is exceptionally proactive and typically identifies complications and resolves them before they become out of control. If you're at a decision point, give LDD a try. You have nothing to lose except the worries!

Kendal Billau
Owner & General Manager
LAD Engineering

Don't Forget to Change New-Hire Passwords

To keep things simple, employers often create easy, temporary passwords for new hires to log in to accounts or devices during their first few days. However, a Specops analysis of millions of passwords found that 120,000 used common words related to new employees, meaning the new-hire passwords were never changed. Hackers know this and use these simple password structures in dictionary and brute force attacks. The most commonly compromised passwords on new accounts are *user*, *temp*, *welcome*, *change*, *guest*, *starter*, *logon* and *onboard*. Look familiar? Prevent this mistake by forcing change at log-in (if possible), using a service like First Day Password or an authenticator app or making a new-hire password REALLY hard.

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Inside This Issue

VPNs Are Not An Invisibility Cloak—*Don't Use Them Like One*

A virtual private network (VPN) is vital for secure modern office work, creating an encrypted connection between your device and a remote server, allowing safe remote access. VPNs also protect personal browsing by masking your IP address, useful for accessing region-restricted content and safeguarding data on public WiFi. However, VPNs are not an invisibility cloak; some services log your data, which can be leaked or sold, and cybercriminals may still track you. Understanding what VPNs can and cannot do is essential to avoid risks.

What VPNs DO (And Don't Do)

VPNs are excellent for enhancing privacy and security. **They DO:**

- ✓ hide your IP address, making it harder for websites and advertisers to track your online activities.
- ✓ encrypt your Internet traffic, safeguarding sensitive information like passwords and business communications.
- ✓ allow access to geo-restricted content, which can be beneficial for business research or accessing region-specific services.

Despite these advantages, VPNs have limitations. **They DON'T:**

- X Make you completely anonymous. While your IP address is hidden, websites can still track you using cookies and other tracking methods.
- X Protect you from malware or phishing attacks. A VPN cannot filter malicious content, so you still need robust antivirus software and cyber security practices.
- X Prevent all data logging. Some VPN providers may log your data, so choose one with a strict no-logs policy.

Warning: Avoid Free VPNs!

Free VPNs can be risky. Many log and sell your data, compromising your privacy. They may also use weaker encryption, increasing your exposure to risks. It's safer to choose reputable VPN providers with clear privacy policies and transparency about data usage.

How To Use A VPN Responsibly

- ⇒ **Choose A Reputable Provider:** Look for VPN services with strong privacy policies, good reviews and transparency about their data-handling practices.
- ⇒ **Enable Kill Switch:** This feature ensures your Internet connection is severed if the VPN connection drops, so your data won't be leaked.
- ⇒ **Update Regularly:** Keep your VPN software updated to benefit from the latest security improvements.
- ⇒ **Combine With Other Security Steps:** To maximize protection, use a VPN with antivirus software, firewalls and good cyber security hygiene.

Understanding VPN capabilities and limitations ensures you use them effectively and responsibly, protecting your data without relying on a false sense of invisibility.