A Guidance Consulting White Paper

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Safeguarding Company IT Assets through Vulnerability Management

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If you are considering vulnerability management consulting services, it's usually for one of two reasons: either you have experienced an attack to your infrastructure and want to prevent it from happening again, or you understand the importance of circumventing an attack in the first place.

Whichever situation brought you to vulnerability management, congratulations. You have taken the first and most important step to safeguarding your business and its assets.

Many companies are reluctant to invest in a vulnerability management specialist. After going over budget on a major IT overhaul, spending even one penny more to protect the system might be the straw that breaks the camel’s back.

That doesn’t have to be the case.

Vulnerability management program consultants work with your company to ensure maximum value in planning and protecting your system. These professionals will develop a plan of action to identify vulnerabilities and address them, as well as create policies and procedures to follow in the unlikely event of a threat.

Simply by being proactive in your system management, you can realize savings of tens of thousands of dollars. Compare this to what you would lose should your system go down for a day or even a few hours. Customers would not be able to access your website, you would lose new revenue for those who could not sign up for services, and you would lose the respect of consumers. It’s a risk companies simply cannot afford to take.

Identifying the Risks

No network is safe from attacks. With hackers developing new ways to access or disrupt your system – worms, viruses, and denial of service attacks being only a few – it is key to invest in strengthening your system.

Vulnerabilities in your system can come from many sources, including:

- Sloppy work by a programmer
- People going around using viral private networks (VPNs)
- Improperly configured security applications
- Clicking on an email with malware attached

Trends in network attacks are leaning more toward large-scale, multi-staged attacks on corporate websites. Twitter was recently attacked, preventing its 18 million+ users from accessing the site for nearly a day.

When your system is attacked, it’s probably not bored teenagers looking for a thrill. There are sophisticated hackers looking for financial gain, so if your system involves sensitive data such as credit card numbers, bank account information, or social security numbers, you may be at a higher risk of attack.

Why Vulnerability Management is Key

It's virtually impossible to foresee an attack, or even prevent one manually. But with proper controls and policies in place, it is possible to strengthen your network and deflect attacks.

The purpose of vulnerability management is to identify glitches and weaknesses in your system and rectify them, thereby improving not only security, but also performance. It can be as simple as finding a bug in your coding, or as complicated as untangling an improperly configured application.

One strategy in warding off attacks is to change the configuration of software. If a system changes, it can be difficult to keep up with the modifications and determine how to attack it.

It is also necessary to stay on top of available tools to reinforce your system. A vulnerability management consultant has access to the latest up-to-the-minute system tools that will help keep your infrastructure safe.

How a Vulnerability Management Consultant Works

It's important to have an understanding of how a vulnerability management consultant works. Here we will walk you through the process of identifying and addressing your infrastructure's weaknesses.

Analysis

The first step for a consultant is to assess your current system and processes (if any) to prevent attack. Because Guidance Consulting's Vulnerability Management specialists are well-versed in systems and their Achilles' heels, they are able to quickly identify where your system may be attacked, and they can make recommendations for improving these areas.

Cost analysis is part of the vulnerability management process. Your consultant will work with you to assign a cost to each vulnerability. Together, you will determine whether it is more cost-effective to work to improve these areas of weakness or to leave them be and risk attack. He or she will also help you quantify risks versus costs to prioritize your vulnerability management needs.

For example, you will most likely want to reinforce your payment system, but it may be more cost-effective to leave vulnerabilities in your company's recreation calendar, as it is a less-important asset in the scheme of things.

Next, the vulnerabilities will be addressed, and your consultant will assist in developing strategies for patching bugs and reinforcing weak areas of your system. Your vulnerability management consultant will do a thorough inspection of all components of your system, including:

- E-commerce systems
- Databases
- Domain name services
- Back doors
- File transfer protocol
- File sharing tools
- Firewalls
- Remote access services
- Email
- VOIP
- Hardware
- Software
- Web servers

At this point, your consultant will provide metrics by which your IT department can use to measure industry standards and ensure that your system stays within the parameters of safety measures for your industry.

Developing Policies

Once all of the assets and vulnerabilities have been assessed, your consultant will assist you in developing policies to implement, should your system be threatened. These will help your IT staff understand how to calmly address the situation and move toward rectifying it without disruption to your system.

Proper policy planning will apply to all security devices and systems within your company, and will involve using firewalls and antivirus protection to detect and prevent attack. Your vulnerability management specialist will work with your IT staff to understand the level of importance each asset holds and will work to develop appropriate policies for each.

Planning for the Future

Once your IT team is secure in understanding how to safeguard against potential threat and what to do if a threat does occur, your consultant will step back and let your system run on its own. He or she can, at your request, periodically check in to ensure that systems are running smoothly. Because many types of system attacks keep evolving, it may be necessary for follow-up visits to ensure your system is well protected against the ever-changing threats from the outside.

As you bring on new IT staff, you may find it necessary to train them on the vulnerability management protocols your consultant set up. At Guidance Consulting, we can train new staff on the policies and procedures we set up to defend your assets.

Available Services

Guidance Consulting offers a wide variety of vulnerability management services, and will work with you to determine which is right for your business. These services include:

- Vulnerability Exploitation Tools/Penetration Testing
- Vulnerability Severity Ratings
- Vulnerability Scanners
- Vulnerability Tracking Metrics
- Vulnerability Tracking Documenting and Communicating

Guidance Consulting works on all levels of system protection. We can develop vulnerability plans based on threat concerns, methods of attack, scanning, reporting, and remediation. Additionally, if you are not seeking a full-scale vulnerability management plan, but just need a few individual services (such as disaster recovery planning or social engineering protection), we can assist with this, as well.

Not sure exactly what you need? Call us today at 678-528-2681 or visit us at www.guidance-consulting.com to schedule a complimentary consultation. Protecting your IT infrastructure has never been easier or more important to do.