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Business Must Stay Connected to Threat of Cybercrime

By STAN STAHL

In the last few years, cyberattacks have evolved from annoyances to incidents having serious economic consequences.

- Sony is estimated to have lost nearly \$200 million from cyberattacks launched on it by the hacker group Anonymous.

- A small business in the South Bay is embroiled in a lawsuit with its bank over who's responsible for a \$400,000 online bank fraud committed by a cybercriminal halfway around the world.

- An online retailer in Venice had its website broken into by cyberthieves who stole customer credit card numbers.

- A downtown L.A. apparel company found a competitor had hacked into its computers and was stealing sensitive pricing information.

- A manufacturing company in East Los Angeles spent more than six months and countless thousands of dollars in an extensive Federal Trade Commission inquiry after the inadvertent disclosure of employee Social Security numbers.

Cyberthreats are real and all around us. Cybercriminals want our credit cards, bank account numbers, intellectual property and identities. Even our children are at risk from sexual predators who troll the Internet.

The most important step in meeting the challenge of cybersecurity is to raise executive awareness. If our business and community leaders – the men and women who run our businesses, not-for-profits and government organizations – know what's going on and what they need to do about it, they can manage their organization's cybersecurity challenge. Right now, the overwhelming vast majority are playing Russian roulette.

That's why our organization – the Los Angeles Chapter of the Information Systems Security Association – has made executive awareness a key pillar of our community outreach program.

Founded in Los Angeles more than 25 years ago, the ISSA is the largest international, not-for-profit professional association in the information security community. ISSA has more than 140 chapters, reaching more than 10,000 security professionals in 70 countries. In December 2009, ISSA International Board President Howard Schmidt became President Obama's White House cybersecurity coordinator.

ISSA-LA is not acting alone. Los Angeles is fortunate in having a growing hub of cybersecurity talent and expertise on which executives can rely. In addition to ISSA-LA, several other professional associations are committed to providing cybersecurity leadership to our community. These include the L.A. chapters of the Information Systems Audit and Control Association, the FBI's infraGARD program and the Open Web Application Security Project.

L.A.'s Electronic Crimes Task Force is made up of representatives of the Secret Service, FBI, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Los Angeles Police Department, California Highway Patrol and the District Attorney's Office. The task force not only investigates electronic crimes in Los Angeles but, like our security associations, provides awareness training and education, particularly in critical infrastructure industries like food, water, power and financial services.

Cybersecurity management

The big four and a host of smaller organizations provide Los Angeles with cybersecurity management and technology expertise. Several of our aerospace companies are developing advanced cybersecurity technology for high-threat environments like the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security. Symantec, a market leader in corporate and individual cyberprotection, has a major research facility here.

We are home as well to several small entrepreneurial information security firms, some of

whom may be destined to show up soon in the Business Journal's Book of Lists.

The rise in cybercrime is putting pressure on organizations needing to hire people with appropriate security credentials. Our colleges and universities – including UCLA, USC, Cal Poly Pomona, Mount San Antonio and Los Angeles Southwest College – are active in educating the cybersecurity specialists we need to secure our businesses and homes. Through a program managed by Jewish Vocational Services, commonly known as JVS, WorkSource California is providing information security training to veterans and the unemployed.

These are jobs of the future as Los Angeles organizations are destined to spend increasing amounts of their information management resources on protecting sensitive information from cybercrime.

A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and the weakest link in our cyberdefenses is the end user. Too often uninformed about cyberthreats, end-users unwittingly let cybercriminals install Trojan horses and other malware on their computers, BlackBerries, iPads, smart phones and other electronic devices. The unfortunate truth is that users must do their part; cybercriminals can too easily beat today's technology.

Our business and community leaders are uniquely positioned to encourage their employees and trading partners to become better informed about the vital role they play in cyberdefense. That's one of the many reasons we encourage you to get involved and get informed, joining us in meeting the cybersecurity challenge in Los Angeles.

It takes the village to secure the village.

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