SA enterprise catches up with global counterparts on IT security

The IT security concerns, challenges and investment by South African enterprises is closely aligned with those of their international counterparts, according to a new global survey by network security specialists Fortinet.

"Where as recently as two years ago, South Africa lagged the rest of the developed world in terms of IT security focus, we now see local enterprises closely following international trends on the IT security drivers, investment and challenges they face," says Paul Williams, Country Manager – Southern Africa at Fortinet.

Announcing the findings of Fortinet's 2017 Global Enterprise Security Survey in Johannesburg this week, Williams said South Africa, included in the international survey for the first time, was stepping up its focus on IT security largely due to high profile breaches and the growing move to the cloud.

The survey, which polled over 1,800 enterprise IT decision makers in 16 countries during August this year, found that the transition to the cloud as part of an organisation's digital transformation journey was a catalyst for an increased focus on security. 71% of South African IT security decision makers believe that cloud security is becoming a growing priority – slightly less than the 74% global average. As a result, 56% of the South African respondents, compared with 50% globally, are planning investment in cloud security in the next 12 months.

"IT security has always been something of a 'grudge purchase', and we still see enterprises spurred to action after a breach or high profile incident has taken place," says Williams. "Our research found that 82% of local enterprises and 85% of global enterprises had experienced a security breach in the past two years. 55% of South African IT decision-makers (*vs* 49% internationally) said there had been an increased focus on IT security following global cyberattacks such as WannaCry. The scale and profile of global cyberattacks is bringing security to the attention of the board."

Increased pressure from regulators has become an important driver of board awareness, said 35% of local and 34% of international respondents. Despite the spiralling cybercrime risk, IT decision makers still feel that board members do not prioritise IT security as they should. 41% of local respondents and 48% of international respondents said they believe that IT security is still not a top priority discussion for the board. 74% of the South African respondents and 77% of international respondents said cybersecurity should become a top management priority.

This doesn't seem to affect budgets, since 61% of enterprises, both in South Africa and internationally, stated that they spend over 10% of their IT budget on security. 76% of the local and 71% of international respondents said their IT security budget had increased from the previous year.

Williams says: "As organisations embrace digital transformation, we see IT decision-makers emphasizing that cybersecurity is a strategic business investment. It is interesting to note that South Africa has progressed in recent years, with local enterprise executives increasing their focus and investment on IT security. The key challenges they face now appear to include the ongoing vulnerability posed by employees, high-level information security skills shortages and buy-in from executive level."

Research Highlights:

82% of South African enterprises surveyed (vs 85% international average) have been victims of a security breach in the past two years. Top threats experienced in the past two years among South African companies were malware and ransomware, reported by 55% of respondents (*vs* 47% international average)**.** This was followed by internal or external data breaches, reported by 46% of South African respondents (*vs* 37% international average).

IT security spend: In South Africa, key investment areas were upgrade of security solutions, reported by 81% of South African and 67% of international respondents, followed by new security solutions and services, reported by 56% of South African respondents (*vs* 60% internationally). 54% of South African and 52% of international respondents had invested in staff training and certification and employee education, while 28% of South African respondents and 23% of international respondents

had invested in new hires in IT security. Implementation of security policies and processes was an investment by 50% of South African respondents (*vs* 57% internationally)

Report Methodology

The 2017 Fortinet Global Enterprise Security Survey was undertaken on behalf of Fortinet by independent market research company Loudhouse to examine the changing attitudes towards security in business in July/August 2017. The global survey of IT decision makers with responsibility/visibility of IT security, received 1,801 anonymized respondents across 16 countries (US, Canada, France, UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, Middle East, South Africa, Poland, Korea, Australia, Singapore, India, Hong Kong, Indonesia). Respondents to the online questionnaire were not aware of the purpose or sponsor of the report.

Additional Resources

·   Learn more about the Fortinet Security Fabric.

·   Read our blog for more in depth information about the research.

·   Sign up for our weekly FortiGuard intel briefs or to be a part of our open beta of Fortinet's FortiGuard Threat Intelligence Service.

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