UAE firms wake up to IT security audit

An increasing number of UAE-based organisations conducted information security audits in 2009 due to the global recession as IT networks became vulnerable putting confidential information at risk. Until last year, the focus for companies was on engineering and process audits and not IT (information technology) security audits in the country. "IT security audits have been low in priority but as government agencies and departments push for achieving certifications, the scenario has changed in the past few months. The public sector has been proactive as there has been a serious government initiative that all departments must be certified," said Ahmad Hassan, team leader monitoring and response at aeCERT (UAE's Computer Emergence Response Team). "Awareness on security threats is on a high in spite of limited budgets. Five years back awareness was low and it was considered as a luxury. As systems worked fine, IT manager would often ask: Why do I need an audit? But now as company information can be accessed online, there should not be any backdoor access available to details," said Mohamed Rizvi Thajudeen, Manager-Information Security and Advisory services at eHostingDatafort.

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DUBAI **Nancy Sudheer**

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In the private sector, companies are going in for certifications for quality purposes and gaining a customer base. "In the UAE, it is seen that companies are working towards achieving a certificate and complying with it," added Hassan.

Organisations such as DNV(Det Norske Veritas) and BSI (British Standards Institution) certify organisations and conduct IT and information security audits for companies in the region. The most popular and accepted is ISO 27001 certification for information security.

"Awareness on information security has grown over the past four to five years. Organisations not certified by ISO 27001 are realising that [their] reputation is at stake. Security awareness and architecture of the company will be underestimated by the outside world," said S Ramanathan, Area Manager-UAE, Kuwait and Oman at DNV Business Assurance (Dubai).

Ramanathan has seen an increase in awareness in applying for the certification among companies in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The region's outsourcing destinations such as Egypt and Jordan are also taking up information security seriously as huge amounts of data are stored in IT infrastructures and networks. Countries such as Qatar and Bahrain are also

joining the bandwagon.

In Abu Dhabi, Adsec (Abu Dhabi security council) has mandated a framework for all government entities whereby they comply by security requirement. "Governments are pushing organisations to adopt best practices in IT and information security. The number of companies secured and audited has increased rapidly. There has been an increase in interest in both public and private sectors. Banking, airline and medical sectors are most proactive in informa-

tion security," said Ahmad Al Khatib, General Manager at BSI Management Systems at Abu Dhabi.

These experts attribute the global recession as one of the reasons for this change in attitude. "Protecting reputation in such kind

of an economic scenario becomes important. Cyber crime also increased last year with both financial and government websites being attacked, due to which security practices were put in place," said Al Khatib.

Security audits are done

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