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Karen D. Schwartz

SaaS Security Woes Overhyped



Karen D. Schwartz, Freelance Writer, 3/22/2012

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If you're considering SaaS for the first time, chances are that you are very concerned about security. After all, you have surely read about attacks over the years on SaaS offerings from companies like Google.

But take a step back and look at the facts. It's natural to be concerned about entrusting your valuable data to some nameless, faceless entity, but those companies have it in their best interests, as well as yours, to do whatever it takes to keep your data safe. After all, if you're not happy, there are plenty of social networking sites you can vent your frustrations on, and that's the death knell of any company that makes a misstep.

There are solid facts to back up the fact that SaaS security is better than it has ever been before. The recently released [State of Cloud Security Report](#) from Alert Logic found that while organizations thinking of moving to the cloud are still concerned about security, security in the cloud is in fact no worse than traditional on-premises security.

This data, backed up by data from more than 1,500 customers and 19 service providers, points out what everyone knows, deep down: Human error is as big of a security risk as anything else. The study bore that out, finding that on-premises environments were 12 times more likely to have misconfiguration issues that could make it easier for attackers to gain access than cloud-based applications.

Take nothing at face value

All of this isn't to say that you should take these claims at face value. It always pays to do your due diligence. Just as with on-premises solutions, not all SaaS solutions are created equally. Before signing on the dotted line, make sure that passwords are encrypted at the highest level, that servers are hosted at a secure data center, that the SaaS environment is behind a strong firewall that can only be accessed by a limited number of trusted personnel, and that end users don't have access to servers.

And depending on your industry and environment, it can make sense to delve even more deeply. Will this be a dedicated or shared environment? If you work for a financial or government institution, a shared environment probably won't cut it. What encryption schemes are used? Again, if you are in a highly controlled environment (healthcare or financial, for example), you'll need the highest levels of encryption. How is data erased, and is it erased permanently? What happens if the vendor is sold, acquired, or goes out of business?

Then, of course, there is another can of worms: accessing SaaS from mobile devices. There are different and more serious security concerns about mobile security of SaaS applications, but that's for another blog.

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batye
3/26/2012 8:53:22 AM
User Rank PLATINUM

Re: No Perfect Security

maybe but in reality of any security in IT - security strong as it weakest link

until technology get properly implimented and back doors get secured...

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Lenny Liebmann
3/22/2012 2:42:52 PM
User Rank **BLOGGER**

Re: No Perfect Security

It's not that SaaS is inherently more secure than legacy IT. It's that SaaS providers have newer, homogeneous environments that they can better harden than the typical enterprise -- which is almost universally a patchwork accretion of heterogeneous stuff that no one really gets paid to secure. Also, enterprises are far more susceptible to human engineering than SaaS hosting facilities.

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Cassimir Medford
3/22/2012 1:17:29 PM
User Rank **BLOGGER**

Re: No Perfect Security

That SaaS may be more secure than legacy IT systems makes sense but it's counterintuitive because we tend to see the new thing as less secure. The devil we know... That could be a bold subject to tackle - Is SaaS more secure than legacy IT? Is that part of conventional wisdom in security circles?

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Lenny Liebmann
3/22/2012 9:45:11 AM
User Rank **BLOGGER**

Re: No Perfect Security

Almost universally, SaaS customers' own IT organizations are an order of magnitude more vulnerable than their potential SaaS vendors. It's just that there won't be any publicity when they have a breach.

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Beth Schultz
3/22/2012 9:24:53 AM
User Rank **STEEL**

Not a deal killer

Karen, I'd agree that security doesn't have to be a deal killer for SaaS use. But, as you also point out, no IT manager should head into a SaaS agreement without its due diligence regarding security.

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Cassimir Medford
3/22/2012 7:46:59 AM
User Rank **BLOGGER**

No Perfect Security

There is no 100 percent perfect security system on-site or in the cloud. If SaaS is saddled with the assumption that perfection is available then that discussion will go on forever. Many times the biggest security breaches are indeed the result of human error, carelessness usually, rather than some glaring flaw in the security system.

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Terry Sweeney
3/22/2012 3:17:24 AM
User Rank **STEEL**

The security bugaboo

Hey Karen... very interesting post, and a timely one, given all the recent hackings by Anonymous and other hacktivists. I think we can agree that any company looking at any cloud-based service or application needs to do more than rely on a security vendor's sponsored report to make its decision about how and where it deploys its security protections.

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7/18/2012 2:00:00 PM

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