



Ignore the bells and whistles

SMEs need to focus on the basics of security

Most firms today rely heavily on technology to conduct business. At the most basic level, this may refer to email to communicate with clients and suppliers. On a grander scale, large enterprise might have a multitude of interlinked systems managed by in-house IT experts.

However, there are a number of problems for SMBs choosing a security solution. First, the marketplace itself very much dictates what they need to do business in an effective and profitable manner. Second, the growing number of security threats – in constantly-changing form and severity – has made security a real problem and no longer an issue that can be put off.

Security is not only related to network activity but also to incidents that may result from any malicious or unsolicited content finding its way into the network via the internet or email. Each situation requires a specific fix. Compliance and other regulations are more recent but equally important considerations. Archiving all company email is becoming the norm rather than a choice.

These factors have put a lot of pressure on SMEs to adapt and implement more secure

technologies to protect their networks. However, this comes at a cost. Security is a cost of doing business. While the initial expense may seem too high for some companies, they must also realise that the cost of not doing anything can be much higher. Faced with such a choice, an SME has little room to manoeuvre.

Looking at the marketplace and assessing these trends for many years there appears to be three conclusions based on this realistic scenario. First, companies are slowly starting to realise that they can ill afford not to deal with network security, content security and messaging issues. Second, they are also aware that security in the broad sense of the word does not come cheap and that only quality solutions will suffice. Third, they also realise that putting the appropriate security levels in place is not an easy task.

Vendors need to adopt pricing bands that allow customers to benefit from quality solutions that address the security and messaging requirements of small and medium sized businesses. Products need to be designed with the SME in mind from the outset and do not, unlike other products, ship with

unnecessary features that will probably never be used.

When potential IT security products are evaluated the main criteria are always functionality and cost. The choice normally comes down to a compromise between the two: Product A, for example, is an enterprise-level solution which has lots of extras, costs well above what an SME can afford and requires considerable man-power and expertise to install, configure and maintain; on the other hand, option B doesn't have the extras that come with the enterprise product but it costs half the price, is easy to install and, in most cases, runs on its own with little maintenance. Moreover, it's designed for that target audience.

SMEs choosing a security product must therefore carefully consider their key selection criteria and find an economical solution which ticks the "must have" boxes. IT security is vital for every business, large or small, but SMEs should ignore the bells and whistles on offer, opt for a simple and realistic solution, and concentrate on their core business activity. ■

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