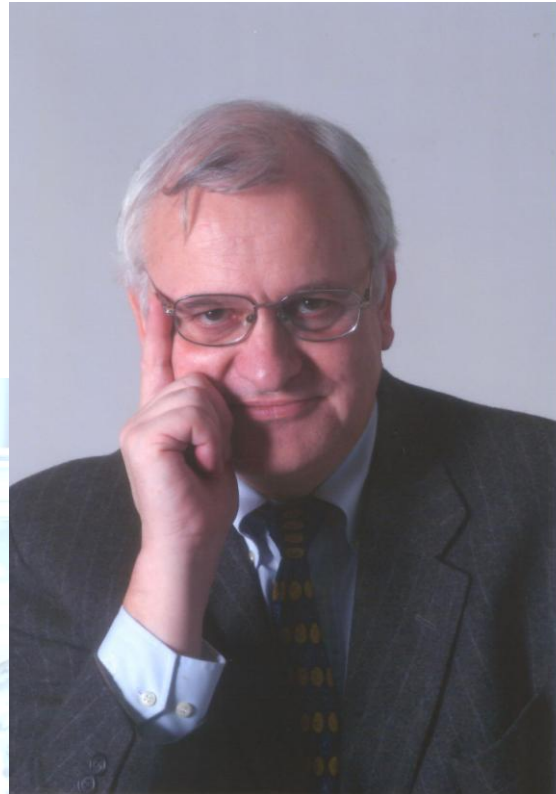


This article was originally published in the Newbury Weekly News Business Review in December 2007.

ITMatters

In this regular column Charles Zealey of ITSolve covers all aspects of business and personal computing. If you have a question about IT matters, email it to Charles on itmatters@itsolve.co.uk



LOOK AFTER YOUR DATA

I write this with the national newspapers full of the story about 25 million missing child benefit records. Hopefully by the time you read it the missing disc will have been found in a mail room somewhere, serving its proper purpose of protecting the desk from coffee stains. Apart from this story, events in the world of formula one motor racing also highlight the need for care with information security.

Few of us have the opportunity to deal with data in the volumes that concern us here, let alone with such sensitive data. However the story serves as a timely reminder of the care that needs to be taken in the storage, use, and transmission of data.

DOES IT MATTER

Much of the data we deal with on a daily basis is either confidential, commercially valuable, or at least its loss would cause severe embarrassment. Consider contracts, business accounts, medical records, educational records, legal correspondence, customer and contact lists, payroll records, and so on. The list is practically endless.

Part of the problem we face concerns the intrinsic conflict between security and usability. We put more locks on our house to make it more secure but then have to carry more keys and unlock more doors when we return home. So it is with computer security. More security can mean systems become harder to use and less flexible. The very benefit that computers give us in terms of the ability to store, manipulate, and analyze vast volumes of data quickly, allows the possibility of security breaches.

START AT THE BEGINNING

As with most things in IT, the key to good information security is to design a system rather than let it happen. Begin by understanding what information you hold, how sensitive it is, who should be allowed to see it, who should be allowed to update it. This will probably be harder than you think! Determine the levels of security to be applied to each category of information.

THINK OF EVERYTHING

Once you have done this you can begin to divide your users into groups and to allocate permissions in the various systems you use. This stage is very dependent on the particular systems you use. You should also consider where copies are made of the information, for the purposes of backup, working from home, using a laptop while on the road and so on. How secure are the copies?

It may seem like a lot of work but consider the costs (both tangible and intangible) of getting it wrong and you will consider it time and money well spent.

Charles Zealey is a consultant working with business professionals helping them to improve their organisation's productivity and effectiveness with the use of Information Technology. Typically a return on investment can be achieved with 6-12 months. To access help sheets go to www.itsolve.co.uk/HelpSheets/. For a free half-hour consultation on business IT issues phone 01635 869863 or email lisa@itsolve.co.uk.

This article is © Copyright ITSolve Ltd 2006-8. All rights reserved. You may copy or distribute this article in full as long as this copyright statement and full information about contacting the author is preserved. The author is Charles Zealey, ITSolve Ltd., charles@itsolve.co.uk. Telephone : 01635 869863.

To subscribe to our newsletter, IT in Focus, email subscribe-it-in-focus@itsolve.co.uk. To 'unsubscribe' email unsubscribe-it-in-focus@itsolve.co.uk using the same email address as that from which you originally subscribed.

We keep our subscriber list in confidential. Whilst we aim to ensure that all out-going mail is scanned for viruses we recommend that you ensure that you are fully protected against all forms of malware attack. We only send our general bulletins to those we understand have given their express permission to receive them. ITSolve Ltd never release, sell or give a subscriber's e-mail address to any party outside of the organisation, except when referring business between individual subscribers. Our subscribers only receive email messages that contain requested information, new monthly articles or announcements of new services.