

## The one big thing you can do to mitigate cyber attacks

Today's external cyber threats are more sophisticated than ever. This article reveals the one big thing you can do today, to immediately mitigate the threat of cyber attack and empower your users with the freedoms they need to be productive.

### The challenge: understanding today's threat landscape

Advances in IT security are continuing to cause headaches for today's cyber criminals, yet as a new breed of increasingly savvy hackers emerge, exposure to a variety of threats remains a fact of life for most organizations across the globe. Without appropriate security measures in place, companies are facing the risk of data breaches, loss of employee productivity, damage to brand reputation and noncompliance, leading to potentially severe fines.

#### External threats

Malware is constantly evolving, with millions of forms being released every year. In fact, McAfee catalogs over 100,000 new malware samples a day (69 per minute) <sup>[1]</sup>. With that, successful cyber-attacks have risen 20% year-on-year, with the average cost of cybercrime standing at over \$7m dollars a year. <sup>[2]</sup>

#### Insider threats

Increasingly, threats faced by enterprises are coming from the inside as well as the outside. Recent headlines have been dominated by stories of data theft driven by maverick insiders. Details of the most high profile event, the notorious breach by Edward Snowden at the NSA, continue to emerge over a year later.

With research commissioned by the UK BIS finding that 84% of data breach incidents are caused by staff, business leaders must be prepared for the risks associated by insiders gaining access to corporate information.

According to a recent report, more than 80% of business users use cloud applications without the knowledge or support of corporate IT. <sup>[3]</sup>

#### Cyber security predictions

Analysts and industry experts predict that cyber-attacks will continue to evolve with attackers becoming more sophisticated in their efforts to find and exploit holes into the operating system and corporate network.

McAfee: "In the spy vs. spy world of cybercrime and cyberwarfare, criminal gangs and state actors will deploy new stealth attacks that will be harder than ever to identify and stop." McAfee Labs 2014 Threat Predictions.

Gartner: "We are in one of those periods that occurs every five years or so, where the attackers find new levels of vulnerabilities to exploit, and the threats get ahead of the standard level of protection." Gartner, Strategies for Dealing with Advanced Targeted Attacks.

### The solution: The one big thing you can do today

The solution to improving your defenses against cyber threats can be directly attributed to the removal of local admin accounts.

By removing admin rights from all users, you immediately improve your security posture, mitigating 96% of Windows vulnerabilities <sup>[4]</sup> and much more. Malware and hackers actively seek out users with admin rights to enable the access they need to files, data and the central network where they can inflict the most damage.

Ethical hacker Sami Laiho, a renowned Microsoft MVP, commented in a recent blog post: "All big zero-day attacks reported in the media from 2010-2013 required admin rights! Malware could never affect the computer in the first place without admin rights."

## Government recommendations

10 Steps to Cyber Security - published by GCHQ, BIS and CPNI  
The UK Government provides advice for helping businesses minimize the risks to company assets, stating that 80% of known attacks would be defeated by embedding basic information security practices in 10 key areas, including Managing User Privileges, Monitoring and Malware Protection, amongst others.

“Establish account management processes & limit the number of privileged accounts. Limit user privileges & monitor user activity. Control access to activity & audit logs.”

### 10 Steps to Cyber Security

## Australian DoD – Top 35 Strategies to Mitigate Targeted Cyber Intrusion

Based on research of attack techniques carried out in 2010 and updated in 2014, the Australian DoD concluded that 85% of cyber-attacks could have been prevented if its top four recommendations had been followed:

- Use application whitelisting
- Patch applications
- Patch operating system vulnerabilities
- Minimize the number of users with administrative privileges

“In a properly designed, administered and maintained environment there is no requirement for any user to have administrative privileges on their day-to-day account.”

### Australian Department of Defense

## Implementing least privilege

All organizations are facing an impossible compromise. The challenge is in finding the right balance between organizational security and user freedom. Remove admin rights and the organization immediately becomes more secure, but the

<sup>1</sup> McAfee Infographic: State of Malware.

<sup>2</sup> Ponemon Cost of Cybercrime Report 2013.

<sup>3</sup> McAfee Labs 2014 Threat Predictions 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Microsoft Vulnerabilities Report, published by Avecto.

employees find themselves unable to function efficiently in their day to day roles, causing frustration for the user and increasing strain on the IT helpdesk. Grant admin rights and you immediately open up the enterprise to a range of internal and external attacks.

To effectively protect the endpoint, elevated privileges must be removed. The principle of least privilege, where all users operate with the minimum privileges they require, is achievable - as long as you have the right tools in place to enable the effective management of privileges across the enterprise.

## Summary

Removal of admin rights is the one big thing you can do today to immediately and pro-actively mitigate the impact of cyber threats. Effectively managing user privileges is the key to creating and maintaining a clean operating system, empowering users and securing your business environment.

Any approach to removing admin rights should not be taken lightly and must be strategically planned. Avecto always recommends that businesses start with an admin rights audit to determine the users and apps running with admin rights across the desktop and server estate.

A layered security approach, using proactive internal and external measures such as privilege management and application control should be coupled with reactive defenses such as antivirus, to ensure the most robust protection.

## About Avecto

Avecto is a leader in Privilege Elevation and Delegation Management. Since 2008, the company has enabled over 8 million users to successfully work without admin rights, enabling many of the world’s biggest brands to achieve the balance between overlocked and underlocked environments.

Avecto’s Defendpoint software has been deployed in the most highly regulated industries, enabling organizations to achieve compliance, gain operational efficiency and stop internal and external attacks.