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Incident response is the process of preparing for cybersecurity threats, detecting them as they arise, responding to quell or mitigate them, and planning for the next one. Organizations manage their threat intelligence and mitigation through incident response planning; for large companies that handle sensitive data, it is particularly important. But any organization stands to lose money, data, and reputation from cybersecurity threats. Incident response requires compiling a team of people from different departments within an organization, including some in leadership, some in IT, and some in data controlling/compliance. Based on the company's priorities and legal requirements, this team must: Plan how to analyze data and networks for possible threats and suspicious activity Decide which incidents should receive a response first Plan for data and finance loss Comply with all relevant laws Be prepared to present data and documentation to authorities after a breach Though not all may result in sensitive data being stolen or financial loss, data breaches are common and happen regularly to large enterprises. Proactively avoiding cyber breaches includes: Training employees to be aware of social engineering tactics, such as malicious links in emails or requests for private information Developing risk management strategies Implementing endpoint detection and response security measures for the entire organization and all devices Avoiding information silos by keeping every employee on the IR team involved and aware Heightening security around privileged access accounts, through which attackers often gain access to sensitive information Thoroughly analyzing all company data, perhaps in a data lake, so that no information is siloed and so that threats can be tracked more easily Automating threat intelligence so that IT staff are not overwhelmed; they won't be able to analyze all of the data sufficiently without machine learning assistance Incident response is not just about avoiding breaches, however, but also reacting when they first occur. The security solutions that a company has implemented will alert a team to an incident; whether it's soon enough depends on the solution and how successfully it's implemented. XDR is one of the best solutions: it's comprehensive and watches all corners of a network, rather than just one or two, for better visibility and detection. Incident response can be a very overwhelming process for organizations, especially because managing huge amounts of data is next to impossible without advanced technology and automation. However, it's crucial for protecting data, not only the organization's private networks but also stored customer information. It's also essential for complying with data privacy laws. Incident response and compliance Incident response became very important starting in 2018 when GDPR went into effect, and CCPA soon followed. GDPR, for example, has extremely strict breach reporting regulations. If a particular breach has to be reported, the company must be aware of it in 72 hours and let the appropriate authorities know what happened. Not only that, they must provide a report of what happened, have a good idea of how and where in the network the breach occurred, and present an active plan to mitigate the damage. If a company does not have a predefined incident response plan, they won't be ready to present such a report. GDPR wants to see not only what happened but also if the organization had appropriate security measures employed beforehand. Companies can be heavily penalized if they're examined post-breach and officials find that they didn't have appropriate security. Introduction The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has issued the Guidelines on the Incident Response System (IRS) (8.96 MB) under Section 6 of the DM Act, 2005 for effective, efficient and comprehensive management of disasters in India. The vision is to minimize loss of life and property by strengthening and standardising the disaster response mechanism in the country. Though India has been successfully managing disasters in the past, there are still a number of shortcomings which need to be addressed. The response today has to be far more comprehensive, effective, swift and well planned based on a well conceived response mechanism. The Incident Response System (IRS) is an effective mechanism for reducing ad-hoc measures in response. It envisages a composite team with various Sections to attend to all the possible response requirements. The IRS designates officers to perform various duties and get them trained in their respective roles. It also emphasises the need for proper documentation of various activities for better planning, accountability and analysis. This will greatly help in reducing chaos and confusion during the response phase. Everyone will know what needs to be done, who will do it and who is in command. IRS Organisation The broad organization of IRS is as under: Responsible Officers (ROs) have been designated at the State and District level as overall in charge of the incident response management. The Responsible Officer may delegate responsibilities to the Incident Commander (IC), who in turn will manage the incident through Incident Response Teams (IRTs). Incident Response Teams The IRT is an entity comprising of all positions of IRS organisation headed by the Incident Commander as shown in the figure below. The Operations Section helps to prepare and execute different tactical operations required in response to the disaster. The Planning Section helps in obtaining information and preparing plans as required. The Logistics Section assesses the availability and requirement of resources and takes action for obtaining them. IRTs will function at State, District, Sub-Division and the Tehsil / Block levels. The IRTs will be pre-designated at these levels and on receipt of Early Warning, the corresponding Responsible Officer will activate them. In case a disaster occurs without any warning, the local IRT will respond and contact the Responsible Officer for further support, if required. Organisational Flexibility The IRS organisation is a need based, flexible organisation. All the components need not be activated simultaneously. Only those Sections, Branches and Units need to be activated that would be required for the given disaster. Each activated Section, Branch or Unit must have a person in charge to perform its role. In some cases, because of lack of personnel, a single supervisor may be made in-charge of more than one Group, Unit or Section. The organisational elements that are no longer required should be deactivated to reduce the size of the organisation and to ensure appropriate use of resources. IRS Training It is intended that the IRS be the preferred Disaster Response mechanism in India and the NDMA assists the States and Union Territories (UTs) in conduct of IRS training for their officers. An annual training calendar is prepared at NDMA based on the requests received from the States/ UTs. IRS Notification Some states and UTs have already notified the IRS and taken steps to form IRTs. Reference NDMA Guidelines on the Incident Response System (8.96 MB) An incident response plan is a documented, written plan with 6 distinct phases that helps IT professionals and staff recognize and deal with a cybersecurity incident like a data breach or cyber attack. Properly creating and managing an incident response plan involves regular updates and training. Is an incident response plan a PCI DSS requirement?Yes, Requirement 12 of the PCI DSS specifies the steps businesses must take relating to their incident response plan, including: 12.10.2-Test incident response plan at least annually12.10.3-Assign certain employees to be available 24/7 to deal with incidences 12.10.4-Properly and regularly train the staff with incident response responsibilities12.10.5-Set up alerts from intrusion-detection, intrusion-prevention, and file-integrity monitoring systems12.10.6-Implement a process to update and manage the incident response plan per industry and organizational changesHow to create an incident response plan An incident response plan should be set up to address a suspected data breach in a series of phases. Within each phase, there are specific areas of need that should be considered.The incident response phases are:PreparationIdentificationContainmentEradicationRecoveryLessons LearnedLet's look at each phase in more depth and point out the items that you need to address.This phase will be the work horse of your incident response planning, and in the end, the most crucial phase to protect your business. Part of this phase includes:Ensure your employees are properly trained regarding their incident response roles and responsibilities in the event of data breachDevelop incident response drill scenarios and regularly conduct mock data breaches to evaluate your incident response plan.Ensure that all aspects of your incident response plan (training, execution, hardware and software resources, etc.) are approved and funded in advanceYour response plan should be well documented, thoroughly explaining everyone's roles and responsibilities. Then the plan must be tested in order to assure that your employees will perform as they were trained. The more prepared your employees are, the less likely they'll make critical mistakes. Questions to address Has everyone been trained on security policies?Have your security policies and incident response plan been approved by appropriate management?Does the Incident Response Team know their roles and the required notifications to make?Have all Incident Response Team members participated in mock drills?SEE ALSO: 5 Things Your Incident Response Plan Needs2. IdentificationThis is the process where you determine whether you've been breached. A breach, or incident, could originate from many different areas. Questions to address When did the event happen?How was it discovered?Who discovered it?Have any other areas been impacted?What is the scope of the compromise?Does it affect operations?Has the source (point of entry) of the event been discovered?When a breach is first discovered, your initial instinct may be to securely delete everything so you can just get rid of it. However, that will likely hurt you in the long run since you'll be destroying valuable evidence that you need to determine where the breach started and devise a plan to prevent it from happening again.Instead, contain the breach so it doesn't spread and cause further damage to your business. If you can, disconnect affected devices from the Internet. Have short-term and long-term containment strategies ready. It's also good to have a redundant system back-up to help restore business operations. That way, any compromised data isn't lost forever.This is also a good time to update and patch your systems, review your remote access protocols (requiring mandatory multi-factor authentication), change all user and administrative access credentials and harden all passwords. Questions to address What's been done to contain the breach short term?What's been done to contain the breach long term?Has any discovered malware been quarantined from the rest of the environment?What sort of backups are in place?Does your remote access require true multi-factor authentication?Have all access credentials been reviewed for legitimacy, hardened and changed?Have you applied all recent security patches and updates?SEE ALSO: SecurityMetrics Learning Center Once you've contained the issue, you need to find and eliminate the root cause of the breach. This means all malware should be securely removed, systems should again be hardened and patched, and updates should be applied.Whether you do this yourself, or hire a third party to do it, you need to be thorough. If any trace of malware or security issues remain in your systems, you may still be losing valuable data, and your liability could increase. Questions to address Have artifacts/malware from the attacker been securely removed?Has the system be hardened, patched, and updates applied?Can the system be re-imaged?5. RecoveryThis is the process of restoring and returning affected systems and devices back into your business environment. During this time, it's important to get your systems and business operations up and running again without the fear of another breach. Questions to address When can systems be returned to production?Have systems been patched, hardened and tested?Can the system be restored from a trusted back-up?How long will the affected systems be monitored and what will you look for when monitoring?What tools will ensure similar attacks will not reoccur? (File integrity monitoring, intrusion detection/protection, etc)Once the investigation is complete, hold an after-action meeting with all Incident Response Team members and discuss what you've learned from the data breach. This is where you will analyze and document everything about the breach. Determine what worked well in your response plan, and where there were some holes. Lessons learned from both mock and real events will help strengthen your systems against the future attacks. Questions to address What changes need to be made to the security?How should employee be trained differently?What weakness did the breach exploit?How will you ensure a similar breach doesn't happen again?No one wants to go through a data breach, but it's essential to plan for one. Prepare for it, know what to do when it happens, and learn all that you can afterwards.Need help with a data breach? Talk to one of our Forensic Investigators.David Ellis (GCII, QSA, PFI, CISSP) is VP of Forensic Investigations at SecurityMetrics with over 25 years of law enforcement and investigative experience.

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