

April 19, 2009

published by [mar.com](#)

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19 April, 2009

By Larry Keating

As Canadian companies continue to fight the economic storm, the solution provider community has to go "back to basics" and remember even though customer budgets are tighter, the need for secure technology remains a constant for small business owners. Some security professionals contend the need for security around company information actually increases in a bad economy, as competition intensifies and the need to protect information increases. Having a data breach or loss in good times is bad, having it in bad times is worse.

Canadian small businesses need help. Mobility, mounting electronic threats and the increased complexity of managing data security means more risk -- leading to data loss, compromised client information and business interruptions, even failures. This is where the partner community can provide real value as a trusted advisor.

Most Canadian small businesses still have only basic data protection on their computers, yet cite data security as one of their highest priorities. According to research firm AMI Partners, 70 per cent of Canadian small businesses (1-99 employees) state data security is a high business priority -- the highest among all categories including business insurance, CRM, business mobility, accounting and audit services.

At the same time they have very low usage rates of sophisticated security products such as identity and access management and intrusion detection. Why? Complexity, time and cost are all factors. In a tough economy, smart businesses will want to ensure they are spending as much time as possible on revenue-generating activity. Solution providers who remind their clients of the importance of protecting their most valuable corporate asset, their information, and who offer to them cost effective and trouble free solutions, will do well.

In this sales environment, knowing your customers' security needs and pain points is key to garnering new business opportunities, whether those are in the form of organic growth with existing customers, or offering a security threat assessment to net-new clients as a door opener.

The primary factor influencing spend on security is protecting the IT environment from electronic threats -- cited by 87 per cent of Canadian small business owners (AMI).

The 2007 report on PIPEDA from the Canadian Federal Privacy Commissioner finds Canadian businesses need to do a better job of locking up personal digital information they collect from their customers. The report found that nine out of 10 Canadians whose personal data was compromised were put at risk because their information was stored in an insecure electronic format without a firewall or encryption technology.

As security threats continue, market opportunities will continue to present themselves. The Canadian Small Business IT security market is the fastest-growing sector of IT spend -- expected to grow at roughly 13 per cent over the next few years to \$500 million by 2012 (AMI).

Larry Keating is the founder, President and Chief Executive Officer of No Panic Computing Inc. which specializes in providing trouble-free, secure, mobile computing solutions for small business professionals. For further information on partner opportunities please visit www.nopaniccomputing.com.