The Snowden Effect:
Top 5 Security Threats

wisegate

When Edward Snowden became a household name in 2013, data privacy came to the forefront of the public's consciousness. But Wisegate Members, high-level Information Security professionals, recognize that data privacy is just one of many critical threats they need to keep their eyes on this year.

Wisegate recently polled its membership of experienced, senior information technology professionals to find out what their top security threat and vulnerability concerns are for 2014. The top responses can be summarized as:

1. Protecting the privacy of data stored in the cloud.
2. Increased enforcement of existing compliance requirements by the government.
3. Still more regulation—both in the United States and internationally.
4. Malicious insiders, phishing and malware—and finding talent to fight them.
5. Data lost to accidental breaches like email leakage and unsafe cloud storage.

The Wisegate research revealed details about security professionals' concerns regarding vulnerabilities and data threats. For example, the threat posed by malicious insiders bent on fraud or theft topped the list of vulnerabilities (59%) while the number one concern among data threats was breach and the theft of valuable intellectual property (37%).

Following the Wisegate survey Wisegate Members who are CISOs and senior IT security professionals—their identities and organizations not revealed here so they could speak candidly—gathered together to discuss their top security concerns for 2014.

Direct quotes are from these senior executives.

Membership
HAS ITS ADVANTAGES

Wisegate is a new kind of advisory service built on the collective expertise of IT leaders. We provide unbiased feedback, experienced insight, and actionable information to our members through an anytime, always-on website, concierge service and mobile app.

Wisegate upholds a high bar for its members because it is through these members that we gather our curated information in the forms of polls, Q&A, product reviews, document sharing, roundtables and working groups. 100% of Wisegate members are senior level, and 89% of them have more than 16+ years experience in IT. There are no vendors, analysts, or inexperienced IT professionals in the Wisegate network.

1 Privacy and Data: Lessons from *the Snowden Affair*

More than half the Wisegate Members surveyed identified data privacy—protecting a company or institution's data from unauthorized release—as the number one concern. Fully 53 percent of Wisegate respondents said that protecting data in the cloud is their top concern, as shown in Figure 1.

Executives cited the high-profile case of Edward Snowden revealing the secret practices of the National Security Agency after simply walking away with reportedly thousands and thousands of internal documents.

> The whole Snowden incident made data privacy come to the forefront of a lot of people's minds. It's a top priority of mine, as well as most of my colleagues and peers. And I think there's still more to come. We'll see more regulations—and government interest—as more data comes to light."
>
> —*"Hugh," Vice President, Corporate Security and Safety, Insurance Company*

2 Increased Regulation and Compliance Requirements: *The Snowball Effect*

There were concerns among Wisegate Members that the Snowden affair is sparking a snowball effect, namely additional calls for government regulation. These, in turn, may mean more investment in compliance with new regulations that wind up, inadvertently, draining investment and distracting information technology professionals from more urgent risks, like deliberate hacking from the outside…or the theft of data from the inside.

> It's a distraction. You end up crossing T's and dotting I's for the regulators, when you could be doing other things. The Snowden thing is so blown out of proportion it's ridiculous."
>
> —*"Julie," CISO, Bank*

After ensuring the privacy of data in cloud computing, the top concerns of Wisegate survey respondents revolved around more regulation and more compliance, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Wisegate Member Poll: *"What do you consider to be your organization's top regulatory and compliance concerns in 2014?"*
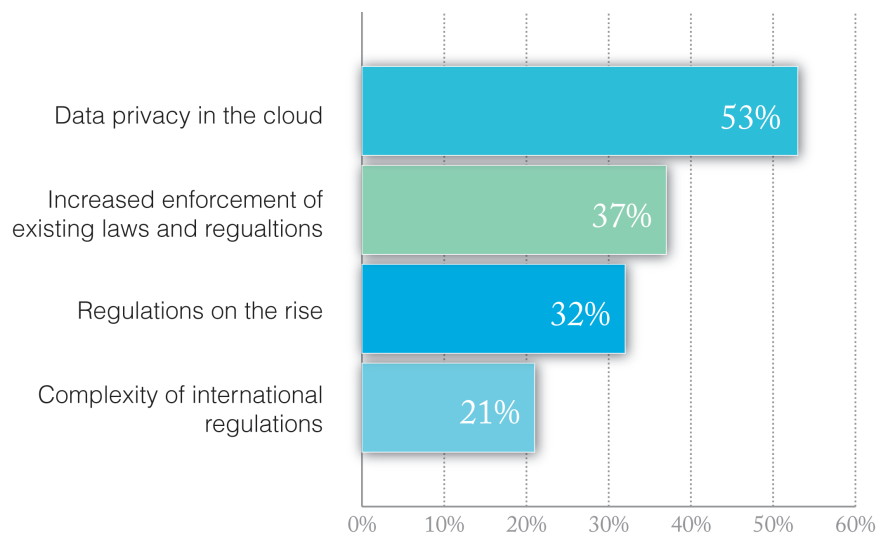
Source: Wisegate, April 2014

③ International Regulations: *The Snowball Effect Goes Global*

Executives in the roundtable raised a collective eyebrow at the potential for increased regulation—not just in the United States, but abroad, too. Some governments, they noted, have big concerns even about emails leaving their borders in the wake of the Snowden affair.

"Gray," an executive in Risk Management at a consumer goods company, relayed the story of his company, which operates Microsoft Office 365. If pressured enough in Europe, the company may have to ask Microsoft to keep email originating in Italy at an Italian data center...and email originating in Germany at a German one. Personnel data—such as employee information—is not supposed to be sent outside the borders of the United States or the European Union, said Gray. *"That's where the EU is going to get into an uproar if they find out."*

> "
> That's the threat we're seeing. It's not so much the monitoring.
> It's the European reaction."
>
> —*Gray, Risk Management Executive, Consumer Goods Company*

4 Vulnerabilities: Top 5 Threats & The Human Angle

Respondents to the survey ranked these as their top vulnerabilities, as shown in Figure 2 (Note: respondents could select multiple concerns).

Figure 2. Wisegate Member Poll: *"What do you consider as your organization's top vulnerability concerns in 2014?"*
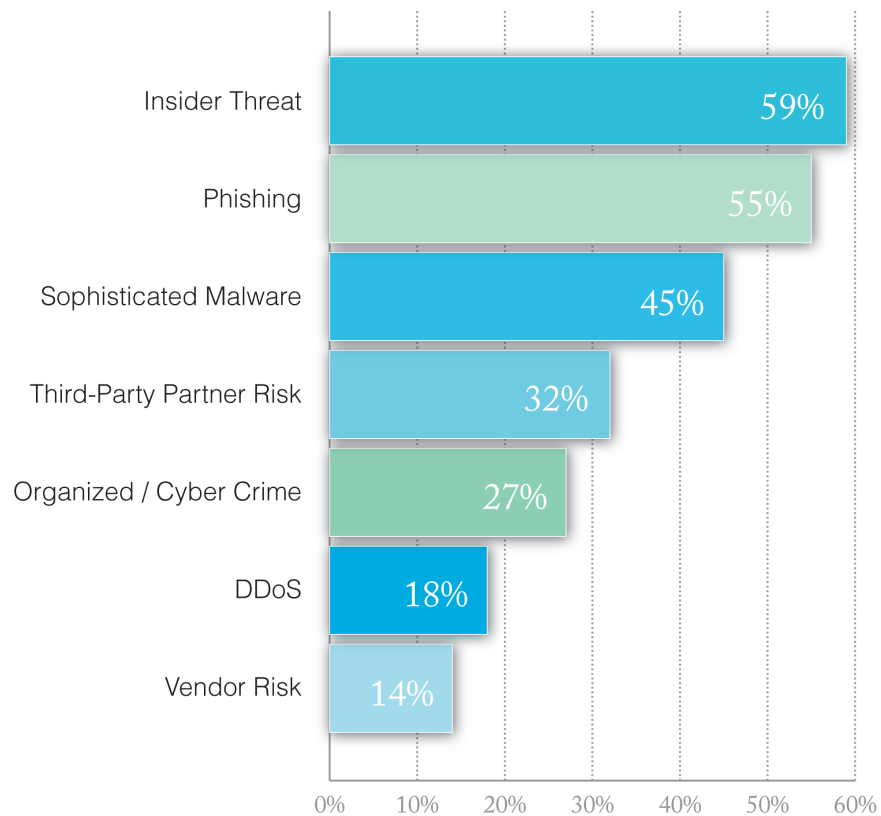
Source: Wisegate, April 2014

In discussion, Wisegate Members focused on the human talent needed to combat these threats—and a shortage of that talent. "Hugh", said his company is recruiting interns who are specifically studying information security risk management in college. His company is also actively recruiting around the world, offering to pay for relocation expenses, paying high-priced salaries and even signing bonuses.

Some companies would like to hire from overseas, but securing green cards for private employment or additional government red tape for its contractors can make solving the talent shortage tough.

> There is a security talent shortage. We need to share and collaborate, talk, and help each other out because there are just too many bad guys. We just can't keep up."
>
> —"Allen," Senior Security Director, Entertainment Company

5 Data Security: The Fear of Intentional Theft

Fear of the theft of intellectual property is the number one concern among Wisegate Members when it comes to data security. With news of the breach of giant retailer Target—and millions of credit card numbers—still fresh from the news, many organizations asked themselves if they could handle such an intentional breach of sensitive information. But accidental data loss, due to mistakes or just sloppy procedures, followed on the list of concerns, as shown in Figure 3.
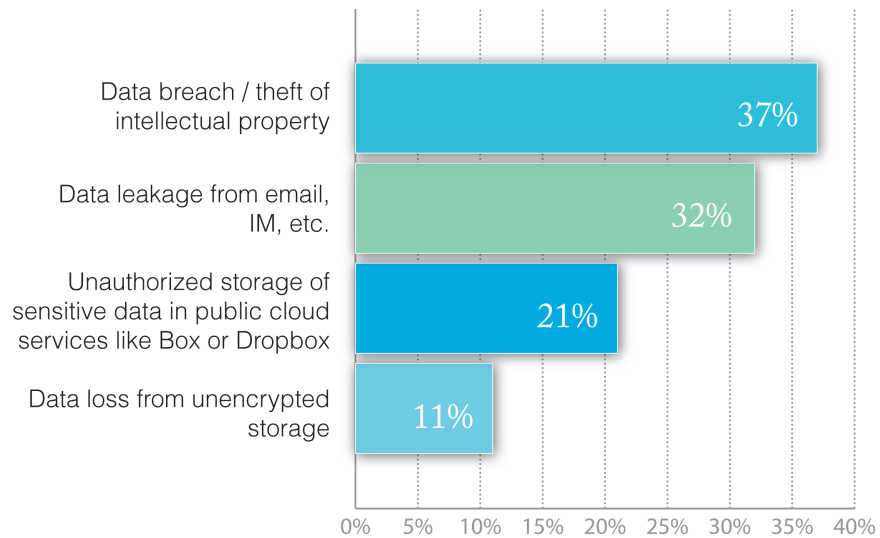
In discussion, Wisegate Members, many executives from top companies, shared tips for combating data breaches—from the purposeful to the innocent. Countermeasures ranged from holding people, companies and institutions financially accountable for the loss of intellectual property to constantly staying current on new threats to tracking down employees who may have accidentally exposed intellectual property to loss.

> The Target breach made news. Even our CIO—and we don't even do retail—has asked us, 'What do we need to do so that doesn't happen to us?'"
>
> —"Stephen," CISO, Consumer Goods Company

Figure 3. Wisegate Member Poll: *"What do you see as your organization's top data-oriented security threat?"*

Data breach / theft of intellectual property	37%
Data leakage from email, IM, etc.	32%
Unauthorized storage of sensitive data in public cloud services like Box or Dropbox	21%
Data loss from unencrypted storage	11%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40%

Source: Wisegate, April 2014

About This Wisegate Survey

The detailed survey results and complete access to Member discussions on these topics are available to Wisegate Members.

Would you like to join us? Go to http://www.wisegateit.com/request-invite to learn more and to submit your request for membership.

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