



Valuable Business Information Going Unsecured

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By Chris Preimesberger

SAN JOSE, Calif.—New research released at the Microsoft Global Technology Summit here Oct. 25 reported that a high percentage of proprietary business communications are being handled nonchalantly through unsecured channels—such as Web e-mail and personal instant messaging—raising serious concerns about the potential loss of intellectual property.

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Highly valuable, business-critical documents such as legal contracts, sales and marketing plans, product designs, financials, technical data and other proprietary information are commonly transported through these unsecured networks, researchers said.

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The most commonly used unsecured channels were defined as public e-mail systems, personal FTP tools, Internet-based faxing, and personal IM, researchers said.

The research discovered that 78 percent of business decision makers (such as directors of supply chains) and 85 percent of technology decision makers (such as CIOs and IT managers) at technology companies reported they had used at least one of a number of insecure public communications tools to collaborate with partners.

The Collaboration in High-Tech Manufacturing Survey 2007, which encompassed 200 companies with at least 500 employees and \$150 million in annual revenue, was undertaken by Washington, D.C.-based KRC Research and underwritten by Microsoft. Those surveyed included only employees—department managers and up to C-level executives—authorized with responsibility for interoffice or intercompany collaboration, Chris Lawrence, vice president of research at KRC Research, told eWEEK.

"We found that pricing information, product plans and other kinds of technical data are the most common intellectual property being sent through unsecured e-mail and IM," Lawrence said.

Only 27 percent of business execs and 37 percent of technology managers surveyed who use those tools considered them to be "definitely" secure, researchers said. Similarly, the majority of users reported that they are concerned about their staff using these tools to communicate confidential or sensitive information outside the company (58 percent and 72 percent of business execs and tech managers, respectively).

More than 5 million White House e-mails are missing. [Click here to read more.](#)

Sixty-eight percent of business execs and 74 percent of tech managers in the survey said the ability to encrypt e-mail or IM, or both, between their company and suppliers was valuable to them.

Tyler Bryson, general manager of the U.S. Manufacturing Industry Group at Microsoft and a keynote speaker at the summit, said he hopes that this survey "shines a light on a problem that has been plaguing the industry for years."

"The use of nonsecure communications tools is staggering, and high-tech firms are struggling to find ways to communicate with value chain partners more quickly and effectively, without compromising valuable intellectual property and other sensitive data," Bryson said.

For access to the full report, go [here](#).

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