

Privacy Breach - Can It Happen To You?

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Hardly a week goes by that we don't hear or read about yet another privacy breach or incident involving identity theft. Last month's high profile incident involving the sale of a large quantity of computer tapes containing highly sensitive personal health information by the provincial government at a public auction highlights once again the importance of properly managing sensitive personal information. The privacy breach had government officials in major damage control mode and scrambling to explain how it could have happened and where things went wrong. The incident serves as a wake up call to businesses and organizations that failure to take proper precautions in the handling of sensitive personal information can result in negative consequences.

Two valuable lessons can be learned from the government's blunder. One, is that most privacy breaches involves some element of human error or carelessness. And two, it is vital for businesses to have proper policies and procedures in place, and even more vital that they are followed. Most businesses are not well prepared to deal with a privacy breach. What if a dealership discovered that some computers containing personal information were stolen during a break-in in the middle of the night? What if credit information such as credit reports on customers were found in a dumpster and the dealership receives a call from

a television or newspaper reporter? Does the dealership have a plan in place? What is the first order of business? What can the dealership do to reduce the risk of having to face such a situation? At the most fundamental level, all staff from the lot boy to the president should have at least some rudimentary training in proper privacy and personal information handling practices. Some of these practices include the following:

- Train staff on the importance of privacy and security.
- Never repeat out loud personal information especially in front of other customers.
- Never release personal information without first verifying the person is authorized to receive that information.
- Limit access to information on a need to know basis - for example, are filing cabinets where employee records are kept accessible to all employees? Who can access payroll information?
- Files on deals in progress should not be left in the open at the end of the day. If the dealership employ cleaners or a janitorial service, all files should be locked up.
- All staff should know who is the Privacy Officer for the dealership and what his/her responsibilities are.
- Staff should be educated on

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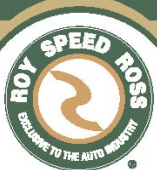
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understanding the difference between a recycling program and a document shredding program.


- When in doubt, documents should be shredded. This includes even harmless looking paperwork such as fax cover sheets or e-mails.
- Internal staff should not be used to shred confidential documents. Low level employees who are most likely to be assigned shredding tasks are most likely to be tempted to profit from their access to sensitive information.
- When computers are replaced, the dealership must ensure that all hard drives are either destroyed or professionally erased.

Adopting sound privacy and security practices must begin at the top and involve everyone throughout the organization. It is important for senior management to continually reinforce the importance of privacy and set good examples on a regular and continuous basis. Although there are no guarantees that a privacy breach will not occur, adopting some of the practices mentioned in this article will go a long way towards reducing that risk. ■

Bailey Jung is the owner of Silver Bullet Shredding, a locally owned document destruction company. Silver Bullet Shredding provides secure, on-site document shredding services to small and mid-sized businesses. Contact: 604.708.4200 or www.silverbulletshredding.com.



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Roy, Speed & Ross Ltd. is a pro-active company that is in contact with IMPACT (Integrated Municipal Provincial Auto Crime Team), IAATI (International Association of Auto Theft Investigators) and has formed relationships with many of the Provincial Auto Theft Teams in Canada to assist in fighting Canada's #1 crime.

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