



Consolidate and streamline IT security efforts to do more with less

How consolidation and doing more with less can lead to opportunity

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CISOs and their teams are being asked to deal with new risks during a period of unprecedented disruption. With finances strained, it is probably not the right time to be asking for increased budgets. So how should CISOs and their teams rise to the challenge, do more with less and position themselves to move out the other end?

The profound impact of COVID-19 on the economy and society as a whole has been breathtaking. The world has not seen a crisis such as the one unfolding currently since the Second World War. While the Global Financial Crisis had a major impact on the Australian economy, for the most part, life continued and people roamed the streets freely. The events of the last few weeks have seen people's lives turned upside down overnight, with repercussions likely to be felt for years to come.

The impact on businesses has been staggering - many going into survival mode. For IT and security teams, significant pressures and challenges have arisen. This has come as a result of huge changes to the way in which the world of work now operates. The major source of angst for CISOs has been two-fold. That is securing a now disparate workforce across a range of endpoints no longer in an on-premises environment. Related to that, protecting the network and devices against the rise in the number of threats occurring as a result of workers connecting to the corporate network remotely.

Regardless of a global pandemic, the requirements for organisations to manage their risk to acceptable levels doesn't go away. Businesses must maintain the privacy of information and their stakeholders, as well as meet the expectations of legislated requirements. The stakes just get higher. However, we're living in unprecedented times. Situations such as the one we're working through currently are extremely challenging to manage and resource. The speed and depth of impact is markedly greater. On a positive front, lessons learned from past economic crises can hold us in good stead for managing the current one. We've outlined three stages organisations typically go through in response to a major global economic crisis; hopefully assisting you to identify where you might be on that journey and how you can progress.

Remain

For many businesses, simply remaining in their current position, or merely survival for the coming months is an achievement in itself. Lessons learned from the GFC hold us in good stead for this current situation. It's likely your organisation is placing all new projects on hold right now. No-one quite yet understands the financial impacts of what's going on. So, protecting the balance sheet by halting new projects tends to be a first action. The next stage involves stopping all CAPEX projects, thus anything involving the purchase of an asset. After that, anyone who owns a cost budget often gets told to save somewhere between 15 and 30 percent of their budgets. It can be pretty brutal times, not just for external suppliers to your business, but for those internally trying to manage budgets and costs. All of this points towards doing more with less, generally adding increased workloads and stress to those already stretched.

Recover

Once those initial measures have taken place to secure the organisation's position, it's time to consider a recovery strategy. Naturally, everything revolves around budget; not just at an individual line item level, but considered company-wide. This is actually an opportunity for IT and security teams to lead - to join in the wider business conversation.

Supplier relationships come under the microscope, as IT and security teams consider how to do more with less. More relationships also means more time and resource spent managing the relationship too - an often overlooked cost to the business. Typically through the recovery period, consolidation of suppliers takes place, yet with a view of maintaining all current tools and systems. While following a best of breed approach is favourable, when needs must, a consolidation tends to happen towards suppliers who can offer a broad range of tools and services. Money is saved not just in terms of a consolidation of suppliers, but also in training costs too.

There are considerations however through the recovery phase. Any initial plans involving capital expenditure were in place because those specific tools or services met your requirements. For security professionals, any deviation from that plan has the potential to introduce risk. Ask yourself, 'Is this the only way I can implement this control? Is there a plan B if CAPEX isn't available? Am I ready to implement that plan if I need to?' Plan ahead, so that you can quickly overcome disruption.

Radically adapt

While it can be challenging to manage both resources and budgets during tough economic times, there's opportunity too. Forced changes can actually help organisations to radically reconsider their overall approach. Faced with having to do more with less, and a more objective mind post crisis, sparks of innovation often fly as adaptation to the new normal occurs.

That includes changing how you deliver things to your business i.e. from on premise and the physical buying of tools, to software as a service and then a managed service. Buying services as opposed to physical products becomes a strong OPEX lever to pull in order to achieve better outcomes. Additionally, stronger leverage might be possible under contracts with security service providers, as those providers, conscious of the drive to reduce cost, will be more willing to increase delivered value rather than reduce cost.

Recommendations

While it can be challenging to lift your head above water right now, it's important to think objectively and consider what needs to be done both now and into the future. At Rapid7, we like simplicity, offering three pieces of advice to help keep your thinking clear:

1. Accept the way you've always done things has been disrupted. The world has changed and what you were doing may no longer be right.
2. Re-examine your entire environment and anticipate the need to move from CAPEX to OPEX and to consolidate suppliers and technologies.
3. Consult widely with your peers and other industry professionals, as we are all dealing with this change at the same time and nobody has the monopoly on good ideas.