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Insights: News Releases

The Second Annual Study on the Cybersecurity Risk to Knowledge Assets

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Second Annual Study Reveals Increasing Awareness is Improving Cybersecurity Practices that Protect the Data that Matter Most

ATLANTA (April 24) – Continuing to respond to the ever-increasing targeted attacks on organizations' most vital confidential information – their "knowledge assets" – Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton and the Ponemon Institute released today their findings from *The Second Annual Study on the Cybersecurity Risk to Knowledge Assets*. The first study, *Cybersecurity Risk to Knowledge Assets*, was released in July 2016.

Knowledge assets are defined in the study as confidential information critical to the development, performance and marketing of a company's core business, other than personal information that would trigger notice requirements under law. For example, they include trade secrets and corporate confidential information such as product design, development or pricing; sensitive non-public information about the organization, its plans or relationships; and competitively valuable or other important information of or about customers, including customer profiles and databases. More than 630 security practitioners familiar with their companies' approach to managing knowledge assets and involved in the management process were surveyed.

The new study shows dramatic increases in threats and awareness of threats to these "crown jewels," as well as dramatic improvements in addressing those threats by the highest performing organizations. Awareness of the risk to knowledge assets increased as more respondents acknowledged that their companies very likely failed to detect a breach involving knowledge assets — increasing from 74% of respondents in the inaugural study to 82% percent in this year's research. Other leading indicators of increased awareness include:

- Boards of directors requiring assurances;
- Integration into IT security strategy;
- Focus on employee carelessness and third party access; and
- Clear trends in technologies to protect knowledge assets.

Of even greater practical value are lessons from the survey respondents who consider their organizations to be most effective in protecting knowledge assets, and whose responses provide other evidence of success in that regard. Here is a preview of the secrets to these high performers' success:

- Much greater attention by senior management and boards;
- Focus on external audits and regular, customized training;
- Much greater reliance on several technologies and processes;
- Significantly shorter times to identify and contain knowledge asset breaches; and
- Most think their knowledge assets are “very valuable” to nation state attackers.

In addition to these best practices and insights of leaders, the study’s practical value is evident in the gaps that it illuminates. For example, the most valuable area of knowledge assets, private communications, prove to be by far the most difficult to secure and among the least well-secured. Here as elsewhere, however, the high performers are significantly more successful.

“Protection of information – whether the information of individuals or organizations, and whether from threats to its confidentiality, availability or integrity or to the rights to own and use it – has become one of the greatest needs and challenges for all of our clients,” said Jon Neiditz, Co-Leader of Kilpatrick Townsend’s Cybersecurity, Privacy & Data Governance Practice. “Kilpatrick Townsend combines a longstanding focus on technology with a distinctive breadth of experience in the protection of information, from our deep engagement with Europe’s GDPR and other data protection and incident response around the world to trade secrets and every area of intellectual property. These challenges and linchpins have led us to form a newly-integrated Global Data Protection Team. Like our knowledge assets studies done with the Ponemon Institute, this team is uniquely positioned to harmonize and improve the organizational, cybersecurity and contractual mechanisms by which personal and corporate data are protected. And as the new study makes clear, we are just getting started.”

“Despite the increased awareness and action, there is still a great deal of work to be done around knowledge asset security and protection,” agrees world-renowned security researcher Dr. Larry Ponemon. “With increasing numbers of companies saying they have likely failed to detect a knowledge asset breach and that their companies’ knowledge assets are now in the hands of competitors, we know the attention to this study and its practical value will continue to grow.”

To obtain *The Second Annual Study on the Cybersecurity Risk to Knowledge Assets*, please click here.

About Kilpatrick Townsend

Kilpatrick Townsend is entrusted with the protection of knowledge assets for many of the world’s leading companies. Seven of the 10 leading digital media and entertainment enterprises look to us to help them connect consumers to content. Five of the top 7 Fortune 50 Future Leaders work with us to grow and protect their businesses. Seven of the ten most innovative companies in the world look to us to protect their most prized assets. Five of the top 10 world’s most valuable brands turn to us to grow and defend the value of their products and businesses. For more information, please click here. Our Cybersecurity, Privacy & Data Governance Practice offers the full spectrum of legal services around the world. For more information, please click here.

About Ponemon Institute

The Ponemon Institute© is dedicated to advancing responsible information and privacy management practices in business and government. To achieve this objective, the Institute conducts independent research, educates leaders from the private and public sectors and verifies the privacy and data protection practices of organizations in a variety of industries. For more information, please click here.

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