RedLeaf Consultancy
A Security Practice

Working from Home – Bringing Information Under Control

# Working from Home – Bringing Information Under Control

Working from home is not a new concept, but with Covid-19 and in a climate where homeworking might become a more permanent feature of life, the number of people who do so has increased exponentially. The certainties and controls that were present when working from centralised office buildings are no longer there, increasing the possibility and subsequent difficulties encountered through the compromise of sensitive information.

Information in its most basic definition is described as knowledge and when it sits on an IT system, it should be protected by cyber security controls. Once it is displayed on a screen or printed out, discussed on the phone or written in a notebook, it can be accidentally lost or deliberately stolen. The resultant damage depends on the sensitivity of the information, but perhaps unlike cyber security, the breach may never be known about with the extent of any loss difficult to judge.

The risk associated with home working has to be understood, and not only does the degree of risk vary between employees but also on the sensitivity of information being accessed. Limiting the understanding of risk to one's own experiences, lifestyle or personal judgement is unlikely to reflect a true position, but should be seen as an iterative and collaborative process that captures the true picture.

The context and assumptions used to introduce protective measures prior to Covid-19 and the impact that they had needs to be reviewed within a Risk Management framework. It is this that will allow a reflection of the difficulties or opportunities that might be encountered, rather than any supposition about them.

- **Review the Threat.** The spread of threat actors from the professional, with the resources and capability to overcome defensive measures, to those who are maybe more opportunist in nature have not gone away, what might have changed is their intent. Added to this are family, friends, visitors and others who share or who have access to the home as well as individual staff members, now working in isolation and whose diligence and loyalty might slip.
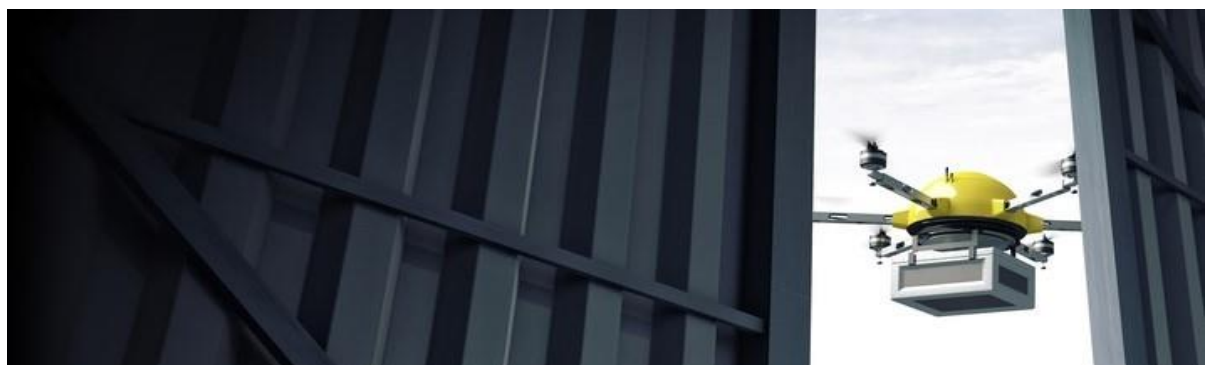
Threat actors have not gone away, they are still there, others will emerge and new
methods of exploiting weaknesses introduced

- **Understand the Vulnerabilities.** Through understanding the methods used by threat actors, vulnerabilities in homeworking will be recognised. How are documents being stored, how are they being prevented from being discarded in bins or being prevented from being overheard or overseen?

Recycling waste makes hard copy information easier and cleaner to discover

- **Modify or Introduce New Controls.** Controls are the means by which the degree of risk can be modified and if existing controls, whether that is vetting, procedures or training do not meet the new working environment they have to be modified or revised completely. It could be that if controls cannot bring the risk down to an acceptable level that homeworking cannot take place.

- **Include in a Governance Regime.** Governance is essential, as it not only brings in responsibility and accountability but allows the ongoing risk to be monitored and predictive information made. Meaningful and measurable outputs from the controls have to be achieved and set within the context of fluctuating threat levels and the business environment.

In itself, the protection of information should not be seen within a silo, but understood as part of the wider risk within a business. The long-term consequences that Covid-19 might have on how businesses function has yet to be seen, however it is likely that individual risk profiles will change. It is not only the effect that information has on the security of a business that has to be considered, but how securely the can operate within, what might be, a new working environment.

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