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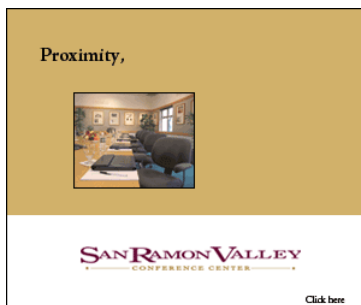
Wireless efficiency can put corporate secrets at risk

East Bay Business Times - January 20, 2006 by [John W. Ellis IV](#)

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Wireless networking is on the rise in a number of industries, and can benefit a company's productivity and competitiveness, but the security risks involved have increased to match the availability and popularity of the communication method.

"People are not just saving time," says Marty Beard, senior vice president of corporate development and marketing for **Sybase Inc.** in Dublin. "They are able to be more productive and do more business by being able to manage and access information easily anytime, anywhere."



The amount and variety of data that businesses shuttle through the air continues to rise exponentially, Beard says, as people use laptops, PDAs and other handheld computers and smart phones to conduct business. Virtually any industry - from trucking, to manufacturing, to sales, to the medical professions - are choosing to unplug their computers and tap into wireless networks.

The more complex and aggressive a business gets about logistics, the more streamlined and competitive they can make their communications by using wireless networking, Beard says.

Companies should first do a needs assessment to determine if they need a wireless network or if they are just interested in buying into the latest state-of-the-art technology, says Jim Bradfield, chief executive officer for NAS Wireless in Dublin, a company that provides nationwide wireless network integration solutions. Costs, management, security and access protocols are among the factors to consider.

With the increase in usage of wireless networking comes a parallel increase in security risks if companies don't properly manage their systems and employees. Companies commonly have open access points in their wireless systems that should be identified and closed.

"A lot of people just want the wireless function to work. But if it works and it is open to the public, most people don't realize it or worry about security," says Peter Eichelberger, an Oakland-based computer consultant.

In a Class A office building, Eichelberger says, he can see up to 12 networks from any given point and can easily access half of them because there are no security measures.

"People are usually just poaching bandwidth," Eichelberger says. "But what concerns me is that they have access to the network."

The biggest wireless security risk comes from employees who provide their own wireless solutions or circumvent company security measures, knowingly or not. Don't assume hackers target only large networks such as Microsoft or Yahoo, Bradfield says, because corporate espionage is not the only issue. Many hackers are looking for information for identity theft.

When work computers are exposed to home networks lacking any security, they are open to information theft, identity theft, and viruses. Public wireless hot spots - such as those at coffee shops, libraries and airports - also pose the same risks. If you have to use a public network that is open, try to limit your activities to Web surfing, says Bradfield, because even e-mail programs are easily accessed by snoopers.

Eichelberger suggests making sure to regularly check employee computer security settings that may have been altered knowingly or not. Installing new programs or opening printer and file sharing options, for example, can change the security settings on a computer or disable anti-virus software.

"It doesn't matter if it is a single user or a company with 1,000 employees, security should be No. 1 for everybody," Bradfield says. "Even pay attention to who is looking over your shoulder at the coffee shop. Many people are so focused on what is on the screen that they don't realize that someone is standing behind them writing down their credit card number."

Ellis is a contributor to the Business Times.

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