



So You're Thinking of Outsourcing Web Security

Here's how to avoid 'snake oil salesmen' when selecting a security service provider.?

By Elad Yoran
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In recent months, consumers have become accustomed to hearing terms such as identity theft, financial fraud, and cyber-theft. As a result, credit unions and other financial institutions are taking a serious look at their established security measures for protecting sensitive member data and confidential internal records. The problem stems from the combination of members expecting instant access to their data and the increasingly sophisticated (and often malicious) threats that have surfaced on the Internet. Members now demand access to their financial data 24 hours a day, seven days a week, through a variety of channels including computers and cell phones. At the same time, members expect credit unions to maintain the confidentiality of their data.

This demand for security places a burden on any information technology department, but the sensitive nature of data in a credit union makes the task even more crucial. To help share that burden and better protect their members' data, many credit unions are turning to managed security service providers (MSSPs).

It's no longer acceptable for financial institutions to set up static defenses and hope it's enough to hold against the newest security threats. New methods of attack emerge on a daily basis, rendering previously acceptable defensive postures largely ineffective. Keeping up with these constantly changing and evolving threats is a full-time responsibility. This is where an MSSP can step in and provide significant value. First, MSSPs continuously monitor network traffic through the analysis of security data and detect actual attacks that occur against a client's network on a real-time basis. Most credit unions tend to have smaller information security staffs and simply can't afford to create a comparable internal monitoring system.

Not all MSSPs, however, are equally qualified and credit unions thinking of hiring one should consider a number of factors. There are a lot of "snake oil" vendors who could do more harm by providing their services than if the client did nothing at all. A false sense of security can often be worse than no security at all. The right vendor, on the other hand, can offer tremendous value in terms of risk reduction. Consider the following factors when evaluating MSSPs:

- What will the MSSP manage and monitor? MSSPs come in all flavors. Some simply communicate alerts when a new vulnerability is announced,

while others analyze log information to detect attacks. A credit union should first identify what the scope of their requirements are and then identify which MSSPs can provide those services at the best price.

- Find out how the MSSP processes log data. Do they use automated technology and human expertise together to isolate and respond to actual security attacks?
- What are their service level agreements? Have they consistently demonstrated a commitment to these agreements?
- How flexible are they with services and costs? Each credit union has unique security needs, so the selected MSSP should be able to adjust to the credit union's budgetary and technological requirements.
- Ask about the MSSP's financial stability, how long it has been in business, their experience, and current customer relationships (preferably with credit unions).

Finally, keep in mind that when making the decision to hire an MSSP, resist the urge to simply decide between doing nothing and "outsourcing" the whole problem. In fact, outsourcing might not be an appropriate word for this service because the credit union must still take an active role in the security process. Instead, think of the MSSP as providing capable personnel to provide expert advice and technical services. The ultimate responsibility for maintaining a secure network still resides with the credit union.

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