

IRELAND LACKS CYBER-ATTACK AWARENESS AND RESILIENCE

The government has been called upon to reevaluate its National Cyber Security Strategy, in light of what one independent senator describes as Ireland's 'disjointed' intelligence and security system, whilst leading cyber security experts claim that businesses need to share information on attacks and create a greater level of awareness to help bolster Ireland's cyber resilience. Report by Grace Heneghan.



Independent Senator Gerard Craughwell has identified several challenges faced by Ireland, in relation to major threats posed by organised cyber criminals. Addressing this year's Cyber Conference in Dublin, he said that "An Garda Síochána is unique in providing both the policing and intelligence services of the state, yet there is no parliamentary committee oversight of intelligence".

Senator Craughwell claimed that this has made it impossible to evaluate just how well Ireland's intelligence services are performing. And he also pointed to the fact that the post of

National Cyber Security Director has been left unfilled for over two years. "Things must change and the HSE was our wake-up call. However, is anyone listening? Thirty per cent or more of the EU data and a significant amount of economic activity is being transacted through Ireland.

"If we do not get our cyber security act together how long will this last? We must become the go-to country for major corporations to invest in, safe in the knowledge that we are a society that is cyber aware and cyber secure," he added.

With the National Cyber Security

Strategy currently devised by the Department of Environment, Climate, Communications, Transport, the senator claimed that the Government views cyber security as a communications issue! "The Department of Defence or the Department of Justice, Law and Reform are not responsible for counteracting cyber threats. The Minister of State responsible for cyber security is Ossian Smith, under the remit of Public Procurement and eGovernment. It is not covered by senior Minister Eamon Ryan."



The panel discussion featured leading cybersecurity industry experts (l-r): Michael Conway, CEO of Renaissance, Desiree Lee, Chief Technology Officer at Armis; Kevin O’Loughlin, CEO of Nostra, Pat Larkin, CEO of Ward Solutions, and Senator Gerard Craughwell pictured alongside presenter and facilitator Paul Hearn, PJH Consulting, technology content strategist and journalist.

SHARING SECURITY INTELLIGENCE

He called for a range of initiatives that would recalibrate Ireland’s national security strategy, including establishing a National Intelligence and Security Service. The sharing of intelligence across security services, and the need for educational programmes about the dangers posed by cyberattacks.

“There are several intelligence-gathering agencies operating within the State – the Gardaí, Defence Forces and government departments – all of whom operate independently of each other. Is Ireland, including the civil service, politics, Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána totally against the establishment of an National Intelligence Security Service? If so, then why?” he wondered.

In advocating for partnerships and collaborations between the public and the private sectors, Senator Craughwell believed that there must be “an in-house ‘Cyber Tzar’, in every state and semi-state organisation, who must be employed by and report directly to the National Cyber Security Centre and not to local management”.

He added that a person in this role would report on cyber security threats and data protection issues to an

assistant director responsible for either government, semi-states, education and training or the business sector.

He also advocated for citizen-based training programmes, and wondered: “When there is a cyber-attack does it take something like RTE’s ‘Joe Duffy Show’ to provide public information? Should the public be informed, and advised what to look for and how to protect themselves?”

EXPERT PANEL DISCUSSION

During a panel discussion, several leading cyber security industry experts looked at the threats posed by cybercriminals to foreign direct investment (FDI) in Ireland, as they explored possible concrete initiatives taken to help bolster Ireland’s cyber resilience.

Senator Craughwell also joined the panel, which included Michael Conway, CEO of Renaissance and founder of Cyber Expo and Conference Ireland; Desiree Lee, Chief Technology Officer (Data) at Armis; Pat Larkin, CEO and Co-founder of Ward Solutions; and Kevin O’Loughlin, CEO of MSP Nostra.

The overwhelming consensus was that a greater level of awareness

and education of cyber-attacks in Ireland is needed, which the panellists claimed was not properly being provided at state level.

Pat Larkin, CEO of Ward Solutions, pointed to significant attacks taking place daily for financial gain at huge costs. “Many cyber-attacks go unreported. The responsibility to change the situation falls on the business



Independent Senator Gerard Craughwell sits on the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. Before working in politics, he served in the British Army and the Irish Army. He was also president of the Teachers’ Union of Ireland between 2012 and 2014.

sector directly, due to an insignificant input from the state.

“Greater intelligence sharing is needed, to enable both business and industry leaders to share information on their incidents and accidents. The human firewall is always an effective form of control, so forums will need to be established to share information,” he added, pointing to a growing need for a National Cyber Security Centre.

Kevin O’Loughlin, CEO of Nostra, one of Ireland’s leading Irish cybersecurity specialists and Managed IT services, said the risk of cyberattacks on Irish businesses and government agencies is at an all-time high.

“A national awareness of the cyber attacks in this country is needed. If the basics are put in place, then the foundation will be set, with greater supply chain and risk management levels to make it work properly. There are daily evolving needs.”

BASIC LEVEL OF PROTECTION
He noted that in the case of clients who had been hacked last year, very few had basic systems in place. “They do not have firewalls in place. In fact, there’s still 60-75% of businesses who do not have the basic levels of protection.”

Desiree Lee, Chief Technology Officer at Armis, the leading US security platform provider, claimed that the cloud-based companies are not totally protected. “And on the dark web and Twitter, there’s now a greater element of information sharing by underground criminals, in order

to develop and hone their craft,” she noted.

Michael Conway, CEO of Renaissance, also pointed to a definite lack of awareness and education within the business sector, and a lack of continuity. “We need to revisit the issue, since resilience is not widespread, especially within the SME sector, which form the main part of Ireland Inc. A greater level of cyber awareness and direction is needed, which is not being provided at state level.”



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