

# LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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## The Employee Education Program You Can't Afford Not To Have

It's impossible to turn on the evening news these days without seeing a story in the headlines about the latest data breach: Target. Home Depot. Sony. The Office of Personnel Management.



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And in case the litany of stories wasn't enough to convey how important information security is in today's business world, many law firms are now facing data security audits from clients in the financial services and health care sectors as a condition of doing business. An increasing number of firms report that insurance providers are examining their data security efforts as a factor in determining coverage costs, and whether to require firms purchase costly cybersecurity insurance.

These facts paint a very clear picture: information security is an issue that law practices can't afford to ignore.

Given the nature of the work law firms perform for clients, it's not at all uncommon for firms to have valuable information assets on their networks and within their walls. We know that those who traffic in information as their stock and trade have law firms in their crosshairs as targets. That point isn't lost on many whose responsibility it is to ensure the safety of that information.

A recent Am Law Tech Survey revealed that one-third of firms who responded are concerned they won't know if or when they're attacked — or exactly what information is compromised.

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For years our technology teams have invested time and human resources into protecting our networks. But as data thieves become savvier, their methods rely increasingly on those elements not as easily secured: our employees. Social engineering attacks are designed to target employees with the goal of them unwittingly providing access to information, whether it be through easy-to-crack passwords, leaving paper-based information in unsecured locations, or clicking on the wrong link and not reporting it out of fear of embarrassment.

Our employees are now seen as vulnerabilities by those who are trying to access information, and they have become the new frontline of defense for our information security efforts. Given that

fact, a comprehensive employee education program is one of the best ways to safeguard against the steady stream of attacks targeting information in our possession.

### IMPLEMENTING AN INFORMATION SECURITY PROGRAM

A successful information security program requires support from all levels of the office. Here are a few tried-and-true ideas to help you win the support you need to implement an effective education program that can help protect your firm — and your clients — in this fast-moving landscape of data security threats.

1. **Focus on the business.** The idea that information security is an “IT problem” or simply about technology is one that can hinder your efforts. Employees believe others have this issue well in hand and don’t need involvement from those outside of IT. Help executives and practice leads in your office see that information security isn’t a technology problem — it’s a *business* problem. Do your clients say that information security is an important issue to them? If it is, and your office doesn’t demonstrate that you take the issue seriously, what is the potential business impact of them taking their business to a firm that does?
2. **Reputation matters.** Law firms bank on their good reputation in the marketplace. Think about those businesses who have breached data, and how long-lasting the association has been between their name and the breach incident. Now imagine the damage a breach could have on a law firm’s reputation – and the ripple effect that could have. Trust and confidentiality are core components of attorney-client relationships. If your firm is exploring data security or data privacy as a new practice area, reputation management is especially important, and the lawyers who are working within that area of law can be great allies in getting your program the support it needs.
3. **Regulatory compliance is nonnegotiable.** Regulations, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), govern certain types of information and require training for employees as part of compliance. Leverage such regulatory requirements to win executive support — and budget dollars — to implement a program at your firm.
4. **What’s in it for them?** Employees watch the news, too, and they have concerns about keeping their personal information safe. One way to make sure your education program connects with employees (and has a better chance at creating behavior change that will protect your firm and your clients) is to leverage a personal angle in your message. If you can show employees how stronger passwords help protect their personal information, they’ll pay attention — and they’re more likely to create stronger passwords at the office, too.
5. **Go straight to the source.** To help win support from key players, consider getting their peers from the client side of the world to tell them how important this issue is to them. Invite a general counsel from a marquee client to talk to your lawyers about the importance of information security in their world, and watch as your lawyers sit up and take note.

Implementing an effective information security education program that delivers real behavior change and reinforces the fact that data security is a business issue that can help retain and win new clients. It is a critical piece of firms’ business strategies in today’s world where information is such a valuable commodity.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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