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Gartner Says Organisations Are More Likely to Use SaaS for Sensitive Data Than for Mission-Critical Data

Analysts to Discuss Changing Risk Assessment Practices at Gartner Security & Risk Management Summit 2012, 19-20 September in London

Egham, UK, 23 August, 2012 — Avoiding the use of software as a service (SaaS) for critical or sensitive data remains a significant form of risk control for many organisations, according to Gartner, Inc. But those that do use SaaS for such data are more likely to use it for sensitive data than for mission-critical data.

These findings are based on Gartner's latest annual survey of the state of risk management programmes globally, which questioned 425 respondents from IT risk management disciplines in the US, UK, Germany and Canada from December 2011 to January 2012.

The survey results show that organisations take different approaches to risk management when confronted with a need or opportunity to share data with different types of external party.

Assessment Practices for External Parties

Survey respondents were asked if they had processes in place to assess external party security, risk management, compliance, privacy and BCP/DR for four different situations. Respondents answered: "Do not allow use for sensitive data or processes" almost twice as often in the case of business partners (38 per cent) as for platform as a service (PaaS) and infrastructure as a service (IaaS) (20 per cent).

Compared with PaaS/IaaS, organisations are about 30 per cent more likely to have a policy against putting sensitive data into SaaS (26 per cent), and about 45 per cent more likely to have a policy against putting it into outsourced data centres (29 per cent).

"These results make sense, given that sharing data with a partner almost certainly means that one or more of its employees will be accessing the data, while in a SaaS scenario, the data is typically only accessible to the primary customer," said Jay Heiser, research vice president at Gartner. "This year we asked about both data availability and data confidentiality policies. Survey respondents indicated 10 per cent less willingness to place mission-critical data into a SaaS offering than to place sensitive data into it. They were even less willing to place mission-critical data into outsourced data centres, with over one-third of respondents saying that they do not allow it."

Platform-as-a-Service/Infrastructure-as-a-Service Risk Assessment Practices

Only 57 per cent of IaaS/PaaS buyers are using a questionnaire to support their risk assessment, and unlike for SaaS, the questionnaire is more likely to be a proprietary one, unique to the buyer's organisation, and less likely to be based on standards. As in the case of SaaS, 26 per cent are also evaluating information from the provider. The most dramatic change over the past three years is the increased willingness to use IaaS and PaaS for sensitive processes.

Outsourced Data Centre Risk Assessment Practices

Thirty-six per cent of respondents said they had a policy against putting mission-critical data into an outsourced data centre, making avoidance the most chosen mechanism for dealing with data centre risk. The level of response for this choice is significantly higher than for either of the other two service

models. Twenty-nine per cent said this policy applied to SaaS, and only 22 per cent said it applied to IaaS/PaaS.

"One of the biggest drivers is probably an expectation that the packaged service offerings, which typically claim to be based on cloud computing, are more reliable," said Mr Heiser. "While fault tolerance is a feature of many such offerings, we consider it premature to assume that mission-critical data is safer in a cloud than in a traditional data centre in which buyers usually make very specific choices about how data will be backed up."

The most significant reduction in the use of risk assessment practices has been in the practice of sending company staff to evaluate a partner's controls on-site, which has dropped by over 40 per cent over three years. Use of standards-based questionnaires has increased, while the use of proprietary surveys has dropped by the same degree, leaving the prevalence of questionnaires virtually the same.

Additional information is available in the report: "Survey Analysis: Assessment Practices for Cloud, SaaS and Partner Risks, 2012," which is available on Gartner's website at <http://www.gartner.com/resId=2000315>.

Mr Heiser will discuss the security state of the cloud at the Gartner Security & Risk Management Summit 2012 held from 19 to 20 September in London. For more information on the Summit, please visit www.gartner.com/eu/security. Members of the media can register by contacting Laurence Goasduff at laurence.goasduff@gartner.com.

Additional information from the event will be shared on Twitter at http://twitter.com/Gartner_inc and using #GartnerSEC.

About Gartner Security & Risk Management Summit 2012

The Gartner Security & Risk Management Summit features four programmes focusing on security, risk management and compliance, business continuity management and chief information security officer (CISO) roles to deliver detailed, role-specific content and networking. Each programme offers a full agenda of analyst sessions, keynote presentations, roundtable discussions, case studies, workshops and more.

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