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Regulations are put on certain data constructs for a reason: the data within is sensitive. Today, there are seemingly more regulations than ever, and as the GDPR kicks in for organizations that deal with EU-based organizations, we thought it would be a good time to talk about how to navigate these highly-regulated environments to ensure success and security.

While there are movements of industry professionals lobbying for improvements to some personal data protection laws, not much has been done about it by legislators in the U.S. The regulations that are on the books work to protect certain types of personal information, but there isn't that over-reaching article that states there will be consequences for losing someone else's personal information. Within certain environments however, it is extremely important to know how to navigate as not to mistakenly expose information that has no business being shared.

In Healthcare

We'll start with healthcare, as it is the most prevalent. Healthcare data is protected, and that protection is regulated, and all for good reason. This information is the most personal information a person can reveal and has no business being in possession of anyone but the provider, the insurer, and the patient. The most well-known regulation for healthcare in the United States is called the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). It was constructed to keep personal healthcare data secure as new systems of transfer and new insurance practices were being implemented.

Healthcare information isn't all handled the same. There are a multitude of organizations that oversee different parts of the healthcare process. The Center for Medicare/Medicaid services focuses on patient care, while the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) focuses on the safety of workers. This is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. With

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CRM or ERP: Which Is Right for You?



At first glance, a customer relationship management (CRM) solution and an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution might seem quite similar. They are both ways to help you get the most out of what you have using technology solutions, but they have specific uses in a business environment.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Simply put, a CRM is designed to provide businesses with a way to seamlessly communicate with and manage both current and prospective clients. CRM solutions are often used to automate certain operations and generally make the sales process much easier and more efficient. Here are some of the major ways a CRM can help a business:

- Better customer communications
- Ability to target potential customers
- Organization for your sales teams
- Customer loyalty and satisfaction
- Revenue creation

Ultimately, a CRM is designed to keep your business' customers engaged with your brand or product. This helps to retain and improve sales figures, all while helping you build and maintain relationships with clients. It's the ideal way to manage operations, onboard new

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Our Top Tweets

@AshtonSolutions June 12 More More We really enjoyed the opportunity to work with **@LaureLiveMusic** over the weekend, especially with all these other great sponsors.



@AshtonSolutions June 11 We are really excited about our newest client, **@holdenarboretum** and **@cbgarden** ! Onboarding is underway, and our engineers have really enjoyed learning about the two properties. Can't wait to spend more time there! Reply Retweet Atlanta Ransomware Attack Recovery Costs Skyrocket - \$9.5M. Why Not Protect Yourself in Advance? <https://t.co/vXpEH5ZSem>

@AshtonSolutions June 9 1700 users on our wireless network **@LaureLiveMusic** and it's still early!!!

@AshtonSolutions We get called in to fix a lot of IT messes. This is work done by a global comms company who works with militaries and governments. Really??

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"This is why I loved technology: if you used it right, it could give you power and privacy." – Cory Doctorow

Is the Internet of Things Growing Too Fast for Everyone's Good?



The Internet of Things is no longer a pipe dream that could become a major influencer in the technology

market. It is now a reality, and as such, you need to take measures to ensure that it doesn't become a major issue for your business. How big is the Internet of Things, truly, and how does this influence your business? Is there even any hope that you can protect yourself from it? Read on to find out.

In fact, it wasn't so long ago that the Internet of Things became a notoriously dangerous entity, and it's all thanks to a little something called a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack. A DDoS attack is an attack that uses many hacked devices to target a system. In this case, the devices were infected with a malware variant known as Mirai. Together, the devices created a massive botnet that was used to attack Dyn, one of the largest domain name providers out there. But the real victims of this attack were much more widespread than just

Dyn--any services that relied on its services, including Amazon and Twitter, were also influenced by the attack.

This fear of a major mobile device botnet is what fuels the debate about the future of the Internet of Things and brings into question whether or not its rapid growth is something to be concerned about. When millions of devices can be connected to create a malicious network and orchestrate a massive attack that downs even the sturdiest of networks, you know that you're dealing with a formidable force. The Mirai botnet specifically targeted devices that haven't changed their default passwords and considering how few users actually change them in the first place, it seems that this tactic was quite successful.

If you take a moment to consider this, it seems likely that the more devices are out there, the more contentious security becomes - not just for the business environment, but on a personal level as well. Most of the devices used in this way aren't devices that you would typically think of as having connected features. Some examples are automobiles, kitchen appliances, and even home controlling devices such as lights or thermostats.

Naturally, the more devices you have in any given area, the more likely it is that there will be security issues in regard to them, so how can your organization ensure that it's not going to be taken advantage of by a rogue botnet?

It's incredibly important that your business prepare for any instances of potential malicious activity both on and around your mobile devices, including any connected devices on your network. If possible, change any default passwords found on your devices, and protect your devices with a mobile device management solution. All of this should be in preparation of a worst-case scenario--a device being controlled remotely by an external threat.

"The Internet of Things is no longer a pipe dream that could become a major influencer in..."

Does your business need security solutions? Ashton Technology Solutions can help. To learn more, reach out to us at 216-397-4080.



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clients, and push them through your sales process.

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)

In direct contrast to the customer-side of the business model, the enterprise resource planning solution looks internally to better manage operations and internal data. It's a one-stop resource for sharing data----all of which represents the different parts of your business. Typically used in manufacturing, the ERP presents quite a few options to manage the supply chain as well as internal business operations. The ERP can provide the following benefits to a business:

- Provide resources to employees for the purposes of planning and collaborating

- Streamline internal processes with seamless access to important data and resources
- Improve collaboration and visibility of important internal functions

In short, an ERP can be thought of as the central nervous system of your business. It provides near-constant access to information and resources that are required for streamlining internal operations, making it crucial for the success of any organization.

Perhaps now you can see where the fine line starts to blur. Both of these solutions have very specific functions not entirely related to each other. Ultimately, an ERP looks at what you currently have and hopes to improve profitability through a closer and more

refined approach to resource management. On the other hand, a CRM looks at how you can improve profitability from your consumer base and increase profits on a quantitative level.

"At first glance, a customer relationship management (CRM) solution and an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution might seem quite similar."

Does your business need software solutions like these to augment operations and improve efficiency? Ashton Technology Solutions can help. To learn more, reach out to us at 216-397-4080.



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so many regulatory agencies thumbing around it can be difficult to ascertain which practices are the best practices, and which strategies work to keep every party involved insulated from having their sensitive information compromised.

“Regulations are put on certain data constructs for a reason: the data within is sensitive. Today, there are seemingly more regulations than ever, and as the...”

For the healthcare providers it can be pretty harrowing, since they are for-profit businesses and need to keep certain information on the ready to facilitate solid operational integrity, as well as to ensure that rising costs aren't sinking their practice. So many providers are constantly revisiting the best ways to stay compliant, while transforming their policies around the existing standards of

data protection. This creates a lot of headaches and toiling over policy. One of the best ways to navigate this arena is to set defined practices that work to mitigate redundancy.

Financial Services

Another vertical market that is highly regulated is the financial services industry. Today, there are a lot of financial organizations looking to IT to speed up operations, cut costs, and manage their businesses more accurately. Since the current congress just rolled back a lot of the Dodd-Frank Act, organizations that work in financial services now have three major regulations they need to be cognizant of. They are the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA), the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOx), and the Payment Card Index (PCI DSS). Some larger organizations will still need to adhere to Dodd-Frank, but smaller banks and other lending institutions that were often hamstrung by the Dodd-Frank regulations, are now able to

operate free from its stated oversight. Here is how each work in regard to data security:

- **GLBA** - Puts in place a mandate that financial services organizations need to identify, adjust, and test their data protections systems to ensure that customer information isn't being misused or misallocated.
- **SOx** - Works to require accurate and responsible accounting, and puts an onus on large businesses to increase the transparency of profits.
- **PCI DSS** - Functions to protect cardholder data, and provide strong controls, reporting, and testing of payment card systems.

The major regulations in the United States are the Federal Trade...



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To Backup Your Business' Data, You Can't Rely on Tape



These days, it's unheard of to run a business without some form of data backup and disaster recovery in place, no

matter how basic or crude. In a worst-case scenario, you could lose so much more than just your business' data. All of the future ramifications of such an event compound and can snowball into a situation that makes it borderline impossible for your organization to recover. Therefore, the best way to approach this situation is to make sure that it doesn't happen in the first place.

For a long time, the most prominent data backup solution took advantage of magnetic tape to store data. The cassette would then be stored either off-site or on site to be used in the event of a disaster. These tape backups are also subject to user error, so unfortunately, they cannot be as reliable as a solution

that is automated. As such, tape backup pales in comparison to the gold standard of data backup and disaster recovery, BDR, which takes advantage of the cloud.

When it comes to tape backup, the lack of automation really hurts its chances of being a viable solution. An employee would have to set a tape backup so that it could be successful, and without doing so, no backup is taken. Since there is no room for user error, tape backup is naturally an inferior option compared to the automated systems you get from a network-attached BDR. If someone fails to set the tape backup, an entire day's worth of data could be put in jeopardy.

Tape backup is also far from the ideal solution because it is limited in its ability to really help your business. Since tape backup is too resource-intensive to happen more than once a day, it has to be done after-hours when there is less strain on the network. This means that more data could potentially be lost. Furthermore, physical tape backups can be

destroyed by fires and floods or corrupted by hacking attacks. They can be destroyed just as easily as the rest of your organization, and as such, must be stored off-site for maximum recovery potential.

Just about all of the issues that you might have with tape backup are resolved by working with a BDR solution. BDR technology allows your organization to keep downtime and data loss to a minimum. BDR can take backups as often as every fifteen minutes, making it the ideal solution to an organization that can't risk losing anything (hint: that's yours). Since data is stored off-site in a safe location, you don't need to worry about external sources messing with your odds of survival.

To get started with BDR, reach out to us at 216-397-4080.



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Introducing the Service Level Agreement



Every business will face a major technology problem at one time or another. Whether it is because your server just decided to quit on you, or you have received a not-so-friendly worded letter telling you to stop using a piece of software, managing technology for a whole organization is difficult. In cases like this, partnering with a managed service provider can be a real benefit. If you are going to choose to outsource some or all of your IT management to a provider, you will likely have to sign a service level agreement (SLA). Today, we look at the purpose of a SLA and how it works to benefit

both parties of the agreement.

What is an SLA

The service level agreement is a written understanding. It outlines the expectations of both parties. Typically, the agreement is created by the service provider and is intended to outline the terms of service.

An MSP's SLA will cover two major factors:

1. **Uptime/Downtime** - Every MSP will offer its core services that include remote network monitoring and backup and recovery. With these two services carried out by professional IT technicians almost any organization can keep

downtime to a minimum. The language in the SLA will speak to the percentage of downtime your provider will guarantee.

2. **Response Time** - This is the measure of how much time a provider has before they need to be on point. If you have an issue, most of the time, the quicker the response time, the more expensive the service is going to be. Your SLA will outline the achievable expectation that will have to be met.

Expectations

Beyond that, the SLA will establish is a description of...



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Solar Energy Can Be a Boon to Businesses



When running a business, keeping the lights on is expensive - and we literally mean keeping the lights on. Power is a costly thing, and with more and more business operations relying on electronic devices, there's an increased expenditure for power. In order to keep your business up and running, you may consider going in a different direction for energy - perhaps up?

Many businesses are turning to solar power to help offset their energy costs. While this technology admittedly does feature a high initial cost to implement, this cost has dropped dramatically in recent years, and can be offset fairly quickly through the benefits. Some data has placed the average cost savings for a commercial property to be a full 75 percent. Just imagine how much of your budget could be freed up to improve your business and its technology!

Of course, adopting solar can also protect your business from fluctuating energy costs as well. Many areas are subject to sudden changes in... energy costs, which can cause further budgetary headaches for a business. Leveraging solar can insulate you from the brunt of these changes.

Solar power can also be good for your information...



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At Ashton Technology Solutions, we don't think of ourselves as computer guys, geeks or techies. Instead, we're problem solvers in the business of helping clients leverage technology for lasting business results. We just happen to have some serious technical skills as well. Of course we can talk geek with the best of them, but that's just the starting point for what we do, not the heart of it.

While we do take pride in delivering the most technically elegant solutions, at Ashton, we get the biggest satisfaction from integrating into our clients' processes, helping them look ahead, avoid trouble, and find better and more cost-effective methods of operating. In other words, we become partners in their growth. Ultimately, we earn our real enjoyment by watching our clients grow and prosper right along with us.

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