Businesses face cybersecurity risk as new research from NTT Ltd. shows surge in remote working and obsolete devices on the network

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47.9% of organizations' assets are ageing or obsolete – compared with 13.1% in 2017 – signaling prolonged refresh cycles as business sweat assets and move to multi-cloud environments.

London, UK – 9 June 2020 - NTT Ltd.'s '2020 Global Network Insights Report' has found that as businesses move applications to multi-cloud environments, investment in the cloud is outpacing organizations' on-premises infrastructure spend. This has caused refresh and upgrade patterns to slow down, with many businesses choosing to continue to sweat network assets and to slow investment in re-architecting their on-premises network and security infrastructure. As a result, there has been an increase in obsolete and unpatched network devices containing software vulnerabilities, introducing risk, and exposing the organization to information security threats.

The report, which is based on data from technology assessments conducted on more than 1,000 clients covering over 800,000 network devices, found 47.9% of organizations' network assets were ageing or obsolete, as a weighted average, representing a huge surge on 2017, when this figure was just 13.1%.

The COVID-19 outbreak and consequent surge in bandwidth consumption is putting strain on the network, compounding existing challenges, and, ultimately, creating a perfect storm. With an increase in remote working, remote access and consumption of voice and video services, organizations' network and security infrastructure are under incredible pressure.

Commenting on the data, Rob Lopez, Executive Vice President, Intelligent Infrastructure, NTT Ltd., says: "In this 'new normal' many businesses will need, if not be forced, to review their network and security architecture strategies, operating and support models to better manage operational risk. We expect to see strategy shift from a focus on business continuity to preparation for the future as lockdown begins to ease. Network infrastructure needs to be appropriately architected and managed to deal with unplanned surges, which will require a relook at cloud and on-premises infrastructure to reduce the impact and frequency of business-critical outages."

The security risk of ageing and obsolete devices in the future workplace

Obsolete devices have, on average, twice as many vulnerabilities per device (42.2) when compared with ageing (26.8) and current ones (19.4), creating unnecessary risk. This risk is exacerbated further when businesses do not patch a device or revisit the operating system version for the duration of its lifetime. And although patching is relatively simple, and often free under a maintenance agreement or extended warranty, many businesses still don't patch their devices.

In the 'new normal,' as businesses reimagine the way we work, embedding resilience into the organization's operations will be key. The pandemic will introduce permanent changes to the way businesses operate, including implementing smart workspaces that accommodate social distancing within their physical offices, while many companies will continue to embrace remote working. Meanwhile, with the adoption of new wireless infrastructure on the rise – an increase of 13% year-on-year – and the rise of open office and co-working spaces, a novel approach to all network architecture will be needed.

Businesses will need the tools, knowledge and expertise to be able to re-architect the network for the short, mid and long-term evolution of the 'new normal' with people working remotely, and from any device at any time. They will need to find strategic partners who can guide them with a view of what the future network looks like – not just in terms of supporting corporate space, but also public and retail areas where social distancing is typically difficult to attain. For example, as we move into the 'new normal', AI and machine learning may be applied to help monitor social distancing measures – the network will be the platform enabler.

The evolution of the network must go hand in hand with digital transformation

As part of digital transformation strategies, leading organizations are already using networks to enable new business models (e.g. the Internet of Things) or optimize existing operating models (e.g. asset

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tracking). Alternatively, businesses may be investing in technologies such as robotic process automation (RPA), as part of their digital transformation initiatives in order to save cost and scale services in an agile manner. No matter what the reason; digital transformation is helping to improve the customer and employee experience, powered by the network. These initiatives will only be accelerated with the support of relevant, secure infrastructure in the ‘new normal’ especially with respect to businesses’ technology, operational and financial initiatives.

Rob Lopez continues, “The network is the platform for business digital transformation. It needs to be ubiquitous, flexible, robust and secure to adapt easily to business change, while increasing the maturity of the operational support environment. Businesses that use a high-level of network automation and intelligence to optimize operations will gain a significant competitive advantage and realize the benefits of the cloud economy, securely.”

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