



Privacy protection should be at top of resolutions Develop policies, procedures in a customer-friendly way

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On the cutting edge - Brian T. D. Bowman

MANY Canadians set New Year's resolutions for themselves at the beginning of each year. CTV News reports that the three most popular personal resolutions are to quite smoking, lose weight and spend more time with family and friends.

It is admirable that so many of us would pause at the beginning of a New Year to reflect on the things that we can do to better ourselves. Likewise, it makes sense for organizations to also pause at the beginning of a New Year to set resolutions.

If you are a decision maker in an organization, big or small, the following will provide you with three cutting edge New Year's resolutions for corporate success:

Resolution #1: Be Proactive with Privacy Compliance

The Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA, has applied to most organizations for over a year. It regulates the collection, use, retention and disclosure of personal information by organizations in the course of their commercial activities. Complying with PIPEDA is quite different than other legal requirements such as paying corporate taxes. That is because the issue of privacy, which is closely related to trust, strikes at the very core of the customer/business relationship. And it is for this reason that proactive organizations are using their privacy compliance to distinguish themselves from their competitors.

If your organization has not yet done anything to comply with PIPEDA, get to work before you receive a privacy complaint. Such complaints take time and resources away from growing your business.

Proactive steps should include appointing someone to serve as your organization's privacy officer and then having a privacy audit undertaken by a privacy specialist. Afterwards, privacy policies and internal procedures should be developed in a business and customer-friendly manner.

If your organization has already taken steps to comply with PIPEDA, review your policies and procedures on an annual basis to ensure that they remain relevant with changing technologies, industry developments and legal interpretations.

Resolution #2: Protect your Intellectual Property

Employees are on the front lines of safeguarding an organization's intellectual property including copyrighted works, patents and trademarks. They also create valuable intellectual property in new products and services. That is why it is vital for organizations to work with employees to protect intellectual property assets.

Basic steps to protect intellectual property can include undertaking an intellectual property audit, which takes stock of existing assets that require safeguarding.

Also, employees should agree to guard and create intellectual property on behalf of the organization. Employee agreements and internal policies such as computer use guidelines assist with such efforts.

Resolution #3: Create an Information Technology Plan You have probably learned about the growing problem of identity theft. What is important to keep in mind is that organizations are often the locations where such thefts occur.

There is no better way to anger customers than to lose their personal information to identity thieves.

In fact, organizations may violate their obligations under PIPEDA if their information technology defences are inadequate. Information technology is also fundamental to protecting an organization's intellectual property.

That is why it is crucial to work with technology experts to properly safeguard technology systems. In doing so, organizations should develop information technology plans to protect data in a comprehensive and sustained manner.

Proactive organizations can confirm that investing in information technology typically results in more efficient ways of doing business.

I hope that these cutting edge corporate resolutions for 2006 will help your business to make the coming year successful and profitable. Happy New Year!

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