

Media Release

Younger Australians the least cyber safe generation

As Australian small business owners grapple with how to protect themselves and their customers online, new research shows young Australians are less likely to be aware of cyber threats compared to their older counterparts.

Small business owners should not assume their young social media-savvy family members or employees have the know-how to defend their businesses from a cyber attack.

Australia's first generation of digital natives are among the least aware of common cyber security threats such as identity theft and ransomware, according to a new survey of more than 2000 small business owners and employees by the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia's Cyber Wardens program.

The survey findings signal a warning for small business owners who regularly rely on younger family members or employees to manage their technology and business social media.

Four in five Australian small business owners and employees are not confident in their ability to prepare for, fight and recover from a cyber threat.

The survey, which examined generational approaches to cyber security, found two-thirds (67 per cent) of Australian small business owners believe tech-savviness equates to cyber safety skills.

While Gen Z employees - those born after 1997 - may have grown up with Tiktok and Minecraft, the research suggests our first generation of digital natives are among the least cyber safe, lacking the awareness and key competencies of cyber security compared to their older colleagues.

The safest pair of hands in the small business community appear to be GenXers and upper Millennials in their 30s, who are the most likely to take cyber security seriously.

Despite the lower awareness of incoming threats compared to their older counterparts, Gen Z rate their skills to prepare for, fight and respond to cyber threats as on par to all other generations, suggesting inflated levels of confidence.



In good news, Gen Z is the generation most keen to learn more and help build a culture of cyber safety, with one in two Gen Z employees (55%) interested in participating in the Cyber Wardens program.

The Cyber Wardens program, developed in partnership with the Commonwealth Bank (CBA) and Telstra will be rolled out this year to help safeguard Australia's 2.3 million small businesses and lock the digital front doors of businesses across the country.

"A good first step is taking stock of who is responsible for your business' cyber protection," COSBOA Chairman Matthew Addison said.

"Don't just assume your kids or younger employees are the safest pair of hands when it comes to online activity."

CBA Chief Information Security Office, Keith Howard, said the Cyber Wardens program will give small business owners and their employees simple information and tools to stay safe online.

"With a focus on practical behavioural change rather than technical jargon, Cyber Wardens will arm small business employees and owners with simple steps to protect their personal and professional lives online. It's great to be working closely with COSBOA and Telstra to help create a frontline defence against cyber threats with Australia's 5 million-strong small business workforce," Mr Howard said.

Telstra Small and Medium Business Executive, Anne Da Cunha said the findings demonstrate the importance of a co-operative approach to cyber security across generations, industries and businesses both big and small.

"Australian small business owners have done it tough the past few years, emerging from COVID, navigating global supply chain issues and for some the impacts of natural disasters, the last thing they need is a cyber attack or scam to contend with," Ms Da Cunha said

The Cyber Wardens pilot program will launch in early 2023. To be one of the first people to complete this training and better equip your small business against cyber risks, visit www.cyberwardens.com.au

For more tips and tricks to keep your small business safe follow [@cyberwardens](https://www.instagram.com/cyberwardens)



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Cyber Wardens intergenerational research report – January 2023*

- **Don't assume digital natives are cyber literate.** Growing up on a diet of Youtube, TikTok and Minecraft does not prepare young workers to be cyber safe employees.

67% of small business owners equate tech savviness with cyber safety skills, however our first generation of digital natives are among the least cyber safe.

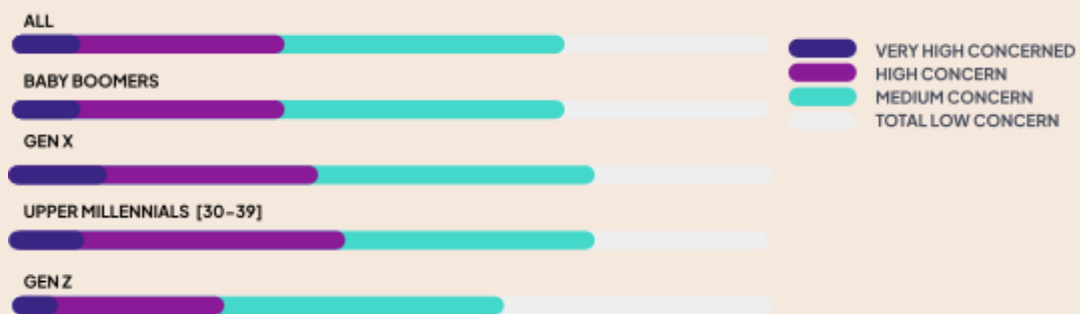
Small business owners who regularly outsource tech support and social media to young family members need to be cautious as young employees can lack key competencies around cyber safety.



- **Gen Z underestimate the vulnerability and risk cyber security threats present for small businesses.**

Despite their digital upbringing, Gen Z are the most likely group to rate cyber security as of low or medium threat to small businesses they own or are employed in.

Q. How concerned are you about the risk of a cyber security attack impacting your work or business?



GenXers and upper Millennials in their 30s are the most likely to take the threat of cyber security seriously.

- **Gen Z are less aware of common cyber security threats, yet equally confident in their ability to respond.**



With significantly lower awareness of common cyber threats, Gen Z will struggle to identify and prevent many of the most likely attacks faced by small businesses.

What types of cyber security risks are you aware of, that you have heard of before today?

	Boomers	Xers	Millennials	Gen Z
Identity theft	88% ↑	77%	72%	66% ↓
Malware attack	85% ↑	77% ↑	62%	47% ↓
Trojan horse	73% ↑	62% ↑	49%	26% ↓
Phishing or spear phishing attack	66% ↑	60% ↑	48%	24% ↓
Ransomware	73% ↑	57% ↑	43%	25% ↓

Only one in five small business owners and employees are confident in their ability to prepare for (23%), fight (21%) and recover (21%) from a cyber threat.



Despite the lower awareness of incoming threats, Gen Z rate their skills to prepare for, fight and respond to cyber threats as on par to all other generations, suggesting inflated levels of confidence.

Gen Z have experienced a similar volume of personal cyber security incidents as Millennials and GenXers.

Baby Boom Generation: Born between 1946–1964	Generation X: Born between 1965–1980	Millennial Generation or Generation Y: Born between 1981–1996	Generation Z or iGen: Born between 1997–2010
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YES (TOTAL)	24% ↓	42%	47% ↑	46%
Yes, personally	17% ↓	31%	29%	32%
Yes, our business	11% ↓	17%	27% ↑	20%

- **Gen Z are less likely to see cyber security as a whole team responsibility & are less concerned about recent security breaches.**

	Boomers	Xers	Millennials	Gen Z
Cyber security is a challenge for all of us, not just something to be left to IT experts	92% ↑	87% ↑	81%	72% ↓
The recent Optus cyber attack has made me more aware of cyber security	84%	81%	76%	71% ↓

- **Good news: Gen Z want to learn.**
They are the most motivated to put their hands up for additional cyber security training and to support small businesses to build a culture of cyber safety.

One in two Gen Z employees (55%) indicate an interest in becoming Cyber Wardens.

Research conducted by 89 Degrees East on behalf of COSBOA, with 2000+ Australian small business owners and employees in November and December 2022.