

Media Release

Small business urged to bridge the gender equality gap on cyber security

As Australians mark International Women’s Day, new research shows women are not as confident as men when it comes to preparing, managing and responding to cyber attacks even though they are less likely to be scammed compared to their male counterparts.

The country’s peak body for small businesses says it is critical women are supported in the workplace to help boost their confidence and understanding of the cyber risks associated with their roles.

A survey of more than 2000 small business owners and employees shows that while female business owners are less likely to be scammed compared to their male counterparts, they’re not as confident as men when it comes to their general cyber security knowledge.

Of those surveyed, almost half of the male-led small businesses (48%) said they had experienced a cyber security threat or incident either to themselves or their business, compared to just 41% for businesses surveyed that were female-led.

The survey is part of the Council of Small Business Organisations’ (COSBOA) Cyber Wardens program, developed in partnership with the Commonwealth Bank (CBA) and Telstra. The program is being 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.

The survey signals a warning for small business owners about the importance of proper training for team members to empower them to protect themselves and their workplace from cyber risks.

“International Women’s Day is a good reminder for small business owners that beyond the gender pay gap, there are many other areas where urgent action is needed to make sure women are empowered and given the confidence to succeed in their roles at all levels,” said COSBOA Chairman Matthew Addison.

“With the Cyber Wardens program, small business owners can take matters into their own hands and ensure their business is protected from the risks of cyber attacks.”

“Cyber security is everyone’s responsibility. The Cyber Wardens program will equip business owners and their employees with the tools to stay safe online,” said CBA General Manager Small Business Banking Sara Sutton.

“The Cyber Wardens program will enable businesses to ensure everyone has the skills they need,” she said .

“This program is a frontline defence that will support Australia’s five million-strong small business workforce against cyber threats.”

Telstra Small and Medium Business Executive Anne Da Cunha said the findings reinforced the importance of training all team members within a business to ensure a collective approach to tackling cyber security risks.

“A true understanding of how to help ward off or deal with a cyber threat isn’t just important for the business owner but for their entire team so that everyone can work together to help build a safer working environment,” Ms Da Cunha said

The Cyber Wardens pilot program was launched 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)



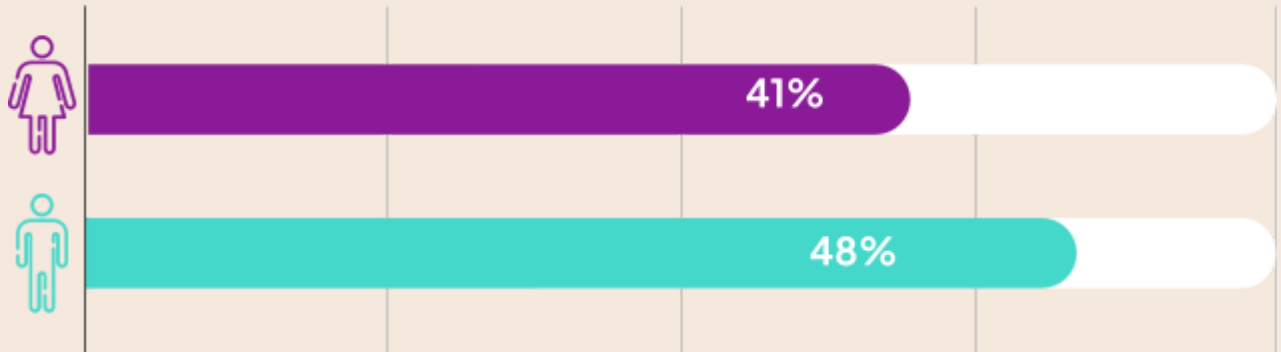
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Cyber Wardens Female Founders Cyber Security Research Report*

When it comes to cyber security, women are savvy than they realise.

An uptick in cyber incidents and recent high-profile cyber attacks are cutting through to female founders and employees, driving their levels of awareness and concern about cyber security issues. As a result, they are less likely to be scammed online than their male counterparts.

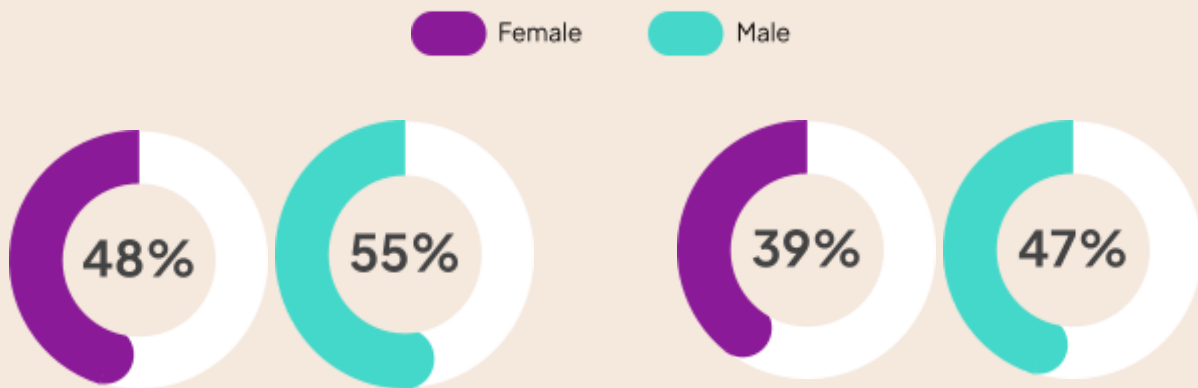
Have you experienced a cyber threat or incident?



Question: Have you personally or in your organisation ever experienced a cyber security threat or cyber incident? Answer=Yes, % Males v Females, n=2016

Good news: Women are primed to meet cyber security challenges head-on.

Being more scam-savvy than men means that female founders and employees see investment in cyber security as worthwhile. They're less likely to accept breaches are an inevitability, and are therefore more likely to invest the time and resources their small businesses need to tackle cyber security.



See breaches as inevitable (compared to 55% of men)



Think cyber security isn't worthwhile, compared to 47% of men

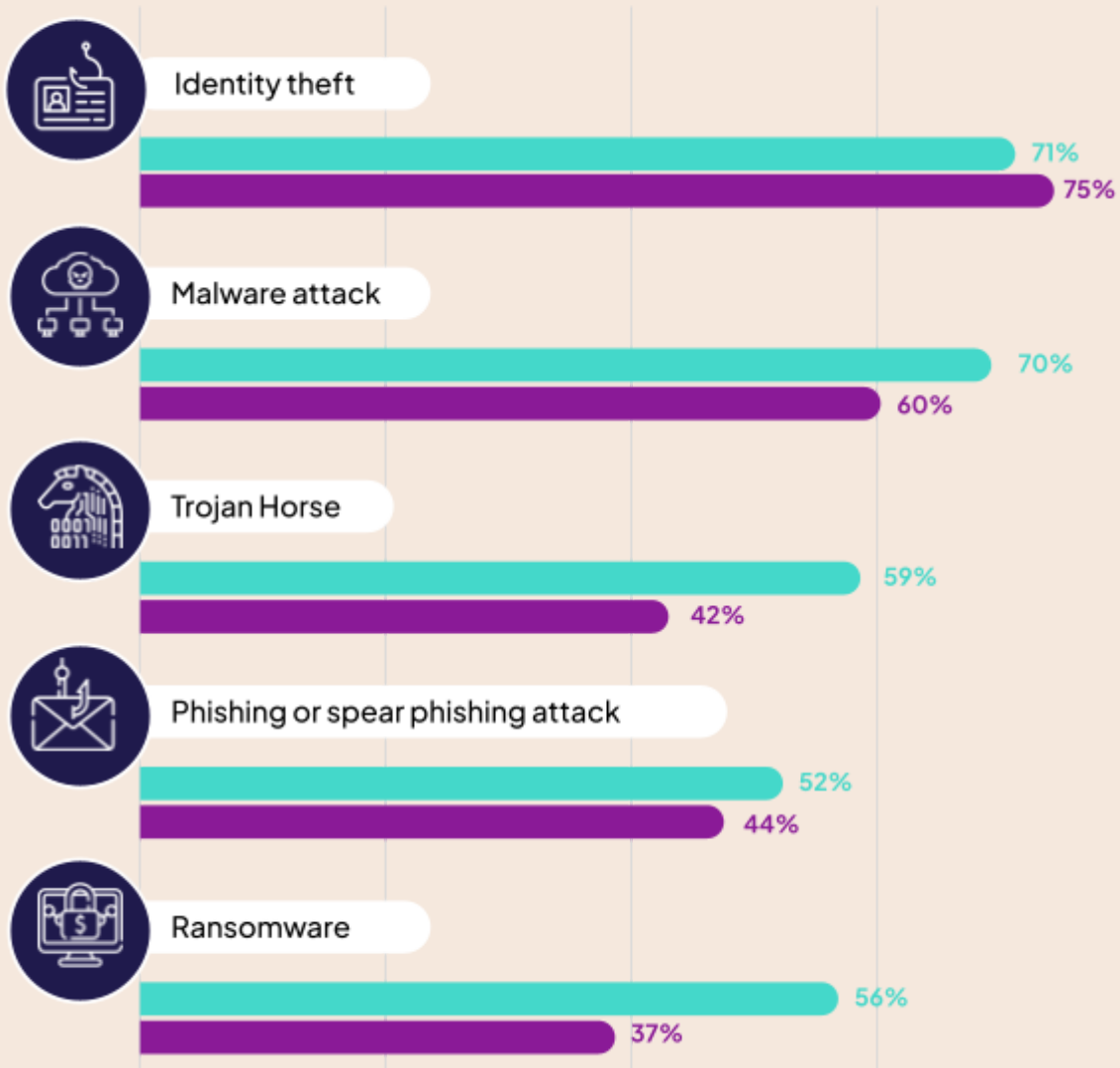
Gender gap extends to awareness of specific threats

Despite general scam-savviness, women have lower levels of awareness of the most common types of cyber attacks, in particular malware, phishing, trojan horse and ransomware attacks.

With significantly lower awareness of common cyber threats, female founders face a gender gap in identifying and preventing common attacks.

Awareness of different types of cyber attacks

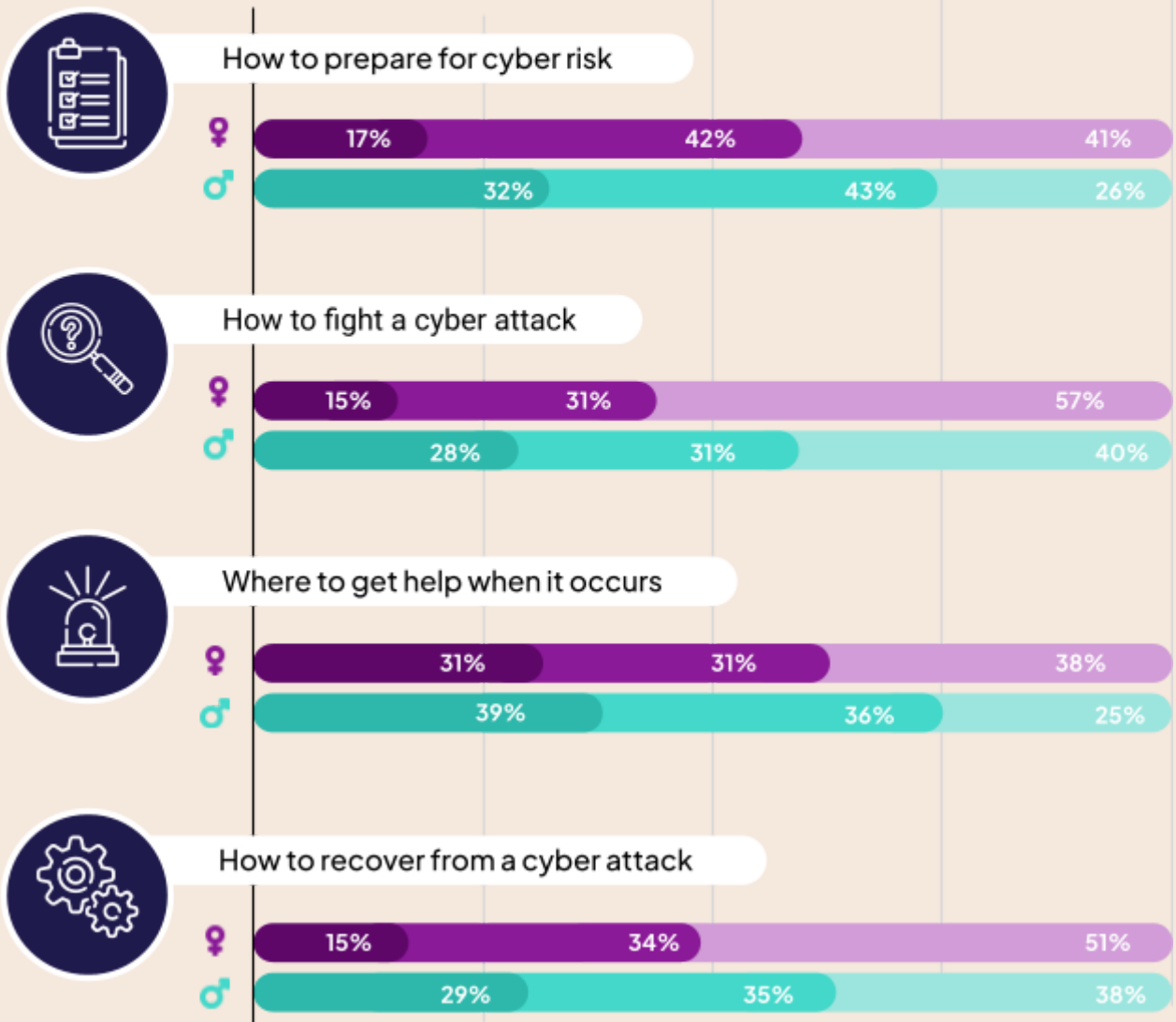
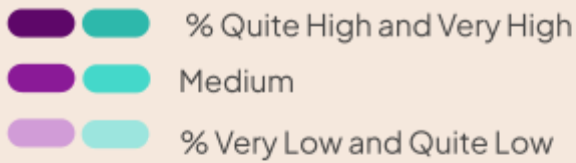
 Female  Male



Extra small business cyber resources are needed to boost the confidence of female founders and reach gender parity in cyber security for small business

Small business owners and their employees need to be supported to prepare and safeguard against cyber attacks, and respond or recover should an attack occur.

Confidence and knowledge:



Key Stats

- The recent Optus cyber attack made women more aware of cyber security (80% women vs 73% men)
- 41% of female founders and employees answered yes to “*have you personally or in your organisation ever experienced a cyber security threat or cyber incident?*” compared to 48% of men
- Female small business owners and employees are less likely to see breaches as inevitable (48% F v 55% M) and investing in security practices as worthwhile (39% answered yes to “*cyber security practices take more time and difficulty than is worthwhile for most small businesses*” compared to 47% Men).
- Taking simple steps like updating devices and technology hardware helps protect against cyber risks, however currently only 1/3 of women surveyed (32%) do this, compared to 40% of men.

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



Cyber Wardens will upskill the nation’s small business workforce and give owners and employees the tools they need to stay safe online, through a free and easy to use accredited e-learning platform.

Designed specifically for non-tech employees, the Cyber Wardens pilot program will be rolled out in coming months to safeguard Australia’s 2.3 million small businesses and upskill everyday Australians to become our nation’s cyber security frontline.