

Unlocking small business cyber safety: tackling an urgent national problem.

Australian small businesses face cyber security threats every day. Yet many don't believe their business could be a target. The belief that being small makes you safe, is a dangerous fallacy leading to inaction on cyber safety.

25 March 2024: In an era where digital threats loom large and attacks are increasing on small businesses, the need to understand how to help small businesses fortify their cyber defences has never been more urgent.

New research out today from the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA) and [Cyber Wardens](#) provides deep insights into what motivates cyber secure and insecure behaviour inside small businesses, allowing us to map a path toward creating a culture of cyber security in all small businesses.

Almost 2,100 Australian small businesses participated in the Cyber Wardens research to provide evidence of the attitudes, concerns, awareness and behaviours relating to cyber security.

Key findings from the research demonstrate that the factors that drive the preparedness of small businesses against a cyber attack are far more complex than the size, age or type of business.

50% of Australian small businesses see cyber security as a high risk to their business in the next five years, while conversely, 45% see cyber security threats as a low to non-existent risk, highlighting the significant divide in attitudes around cyber risks. And 7 in 10 (67%) small business owners/CEOs and employees said major cyber attacks on big companies had made them think more about cyber security, **however, this isn't necessarily translating into small businesses doing more to help protect themselves.**

Crucially, the research underscores the pivotal role of cultivating a cyber-safe mindset within small businesses. The most cyber-safe small businesses have a cyber-centric outlook and are intentional in their approach to cyber security. They think and talk about cyber security regularly and see it as everyone's responsibility. They also dedicate resources and embed cyber security into day-to-day operations.

Most small businesses (61%) are not talking about cyber security regularly, which further increases the risk they face. And on average, **4 in 10 small businesses have little to no confidence in their ability to respond to a cyber threat.**

Even when small businesses see the value in embracing a culture of cyber security they face several barriers. They don't know where to begin with cyber security. They feel intimidated by technical jargon, overwhelmed by not knowing what steps to take, and doubtful that they have the time, resources and digital literacy to protect their businesses against cyber threats.

The COSBOA Cyber Wardens program comes at a pivotal moment, addressing the pressing need for simple and achievable cyber security measures tailored to small businesses. Amid escalating cyber threats, the program provides a lifeline for businesses eager to bolster their cyber resilience without being overwhelmed by technical jargon or complex protocols.

An overwhelming majority of small business owners and employees (86%) express keen interest in a program that simplifies cyber security and renders it attainable for businesses of all sizes. Moreover, there's a resounding acknowledgement of the value of having team members adept at identifying and responding to cyber threats. This not only safeguards the business but also enhances job security, fosters better client relationships, and instils peace of mind among stakeholders.

This research is the first step in understanding what small businesses need to do, what might be standing in their way and what we can do to support them. From the survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews, five attitudinal and behavioural segments have been developed. **These segments will help inform the national delivery of the Cyber Wardens program and instil the cultural change and technical uplift that Australian small businesses need to protect themselves.**

At the launch of the research in Canberra today, attendees will be able to contribute to the design of the next Cyber Wardens resources to support building a culture of cyber safety in Australian small businesses. As businesses gear up to embrace the digital frontier, the Cyber Wardens program stands ready to empower them with the knowledge and resources needed to navigate this landscape securely.

The Cyber Wardens program is the vehicle for this national cultural change and supports the technical uplift needed to protect Australian small businesses from evolving and increased cyber threats.

Quotes to be attributed to COSBOA CEO Luke Achterstraat:

“This new data shows us that small businesses simply cannot fall into the trap of thinking they’re too small to be a target for cyber criminals.

“It is important for small businesses to remain aware of the increasingly acute risk of cyber attacks. COSBOA’s Cyber Wardens program can help give small business owners the skills to help mitigate the risks.

“Investing in cyber security training and tools is essential to help protect your small business, staff and clients. With Cyber Wardens we’ve made that training free and easy for small businesses.”

Quotes to be attributed to CommBank Executive General Manager, Small Business Banking, Rebecca Warren:

“We know that small businesses are very time-poor and this can make them an easier target for cyber criminals.

“Cyber security can seem very complex, so it’s easy to see why some find it overwhelming, which is why education is crucial in helping people realise the dangers that are out there, and how to protect themselves against it.

“At Commonwealth Bank, we’re working hard to raise awareness among our customers about cyber threats, scams and fraud.

“One of the ways we do that is through our partnership with COSBOA and the Cyber Wardens program, which is all about upskilling small businesses in cyber safety.”

Quotes to be attributed to Telstra Chief Information Security Officer Narelle Devine:

“Cyber criminals are notoriously persistent and are constantly adapting their techniques to target all types of businesses and individuals.

“No one is immune from the threat, which is why cyber security must be a team sport and a permanent mindset. Building support with a strong team culture where cyber security is everyone’s responsibility is critical.

“The Cyber Wardens program is helping equip Australian businesses to better protect themselves by pairing critical technical know-how with a focus on behaviour change.”

For more information, please visit cyberwardens.com.au

o arrange interviews please call 0466 027 957 or email media@89cyberwardens.com.au

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Background

About Cyber Wardens

At Cyber Wardens, we are on a mission to ensure Australian small businesses operate in a cyber-safe environment.

By bolstering the cyber capabilities of people who work in small businesses, we make it easier for small businesses to increase their cyber posture to prevent attacks and be resilient to them. Our goal is simple — for cyber criminals to consider Australia 'closed for business'.

Cyber Wardens is a national initiative of the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia (COSBOA), supported by the Australian Government and an industry alliance led by Telstra, CommBank and the Australian Cyber Security Centre, to help protect Australia's 2.5 million small businesses from online threats.

Cyber Wardens are the digital equivalent of first aid officers or fire safety wardens. They are equipped to prevent, prepare, fight and help recover from a cyber attack such as the theft of customer data or intellectual property.

Just as we physically protect ourselves by locking up our businesses and homes at night, the Cyber Wardens program will give small businesses the skills to shut their digital doors to lurking cyber threats.

Leveraging COSBOA's grassroots infrastructure and reputation to change the behaviours of Australia's 2.5 million small businesses, the free Cyber Wardens program uplifts small businesses by educating an in-house cyber safety officer to build cultural competencies alongside technical know-how. The program aims to train 50,000 Cyber Wardens across Australia in three years.

By bolstering the cyber capabilities of people who work in small businesses, we make it easier for small businesses to prevent and recover from cyber-attacks.

Cyber Wardens will complement Australia's growing pool of cyber technical experts to drive cultural change and cyber-safe mindsets in Australia's small businesses.

The Cyber Wardens program works in conjunction with two new initiatives recently announced by the Albanese Government: \$7.2 million to establish a voluntary cyber health-check program that will allow businesses to undertake a free, tailored self-assessment of their cyber security maturity, and \$11 million in the Small Business Cyber Resilience Service which will provide one-on-one assistance to help small businesses navigate their cyber challenges, including walking them through the steps to recover from a cyber attack.