Making a Visible Statement

Russ Mumford, president of Greenidea, talks about an interesting way to help secure computers and information

Q: Securing computers and information is an issue facing corporations of all sizes. What, in your opinion, are some of the larger problems?

A: Just some of the issues companies have to address are password protection, document and laptop protection, virus attacks and software piracy. Persuading employees to act responsibly with company information and property can be very difficult. For example, most employees would not leave home without locking the doors, but do they lock the office door when they pop out to buy a sandwich? Probably not. And so, in order to effectively address the problems surrounding security, employees need to be made aware of them, as well as how to avoid or solve them — preferably on a regular basis.

Q: You have created a way to help do that. What is it?

A: Let me start by saying that I believe security is a state of mind. If you think secure, you have made the first step towards behaving securely.

Following that line of thinking, Greenidea has developed a computer-based delivery system that effectively reinforces a company's most important messages on a daily basis at the desktops where people work. Once installed, messages automatically appear on the monitor every time a computer is used.

Q: How does it work?

A: Visible Statement takes advantage of the inherent presentation capabilities of modern PCs to deliver security policy messages to staff. It is designed to facilitate a security awareness program by delivering security advice in a highly graphical animated form to enhance recipients' ability to retain the messages in their minds.

It uses the almost subliminal approach of hijacking the screensaver to deliver the animated messages. The ubiquity of PCs in the modern workplace means that it is now the ideal platform to present any message you wish to get across to your employees.

Visible Statement can be customized to suit any organization's needs and the animated modules can be designed to support varied training priorities and corporate cultures. In fact, during the past several years, we've customized the program for a number of large firms, including KPMG, Compaq and Lockheed Martin.
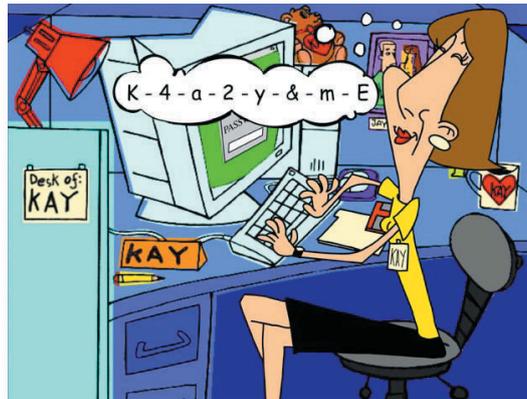

Image courtesy of Greenidea

Also, Visible Statement can be used to present any ideas — not just those related to computer and information security. We've concentrated on delivering a number of off-the-shelf security messages that currently include such things as company asset protection, unattended workstations and challenging strangers, but non-security related messages can also be added.

Q: Why do you think this type of program is necessary?

A: Getting security messages across to employees is notoriously difficult. Security is not as exciting a subject for everyone as it is for security gurus — and, of course, thieves and hackers!

Making security an interesting and exciting subject is what Visible Statement aims to do by using humour and cartoon characters, together with amusing sounds. The software's use of the screensaver to deliver security messages is also non-intrusive. And although there is nothing to prevent users changing the screensaver to something else, there are third-party products that could be used to perform this lock-down function if required.

Q: You mentioned earlier that repetition was another important component in effective training. Can you expand on that?

A: Sure. Studies show that concentrated training fails to deliver long-term results unless it is supplemented by repetition that is spaced over time. That is what Visible Statement does. And, by showing several different messages in random order, the animated software also eliminates the boredom factor and the risk that people will tune out and simply not see the message at which they are looking.

Q: Is there anything we haven't covered?

A: Yes. The software offers an auto updater that facilitates the easy distribution of new animation automatically over a network and requires virtually no administration. Once installed on each desktop, animated messages can be updated from a central location. When the system manager wishes to change a message, he or she simply replaces the animation file on the central server with the new one.

Also, the software now enables self-authoring capabilities for simple graphic files so users can address any major security issues immediately without waiting weeks to put an animation together. And, finally, Visible Statement is available not just in English but also in German and, shortly, in French. ♣

Editor's Note: A free evaluation copy with four animated modules is available by request at www.greenidea.com.

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