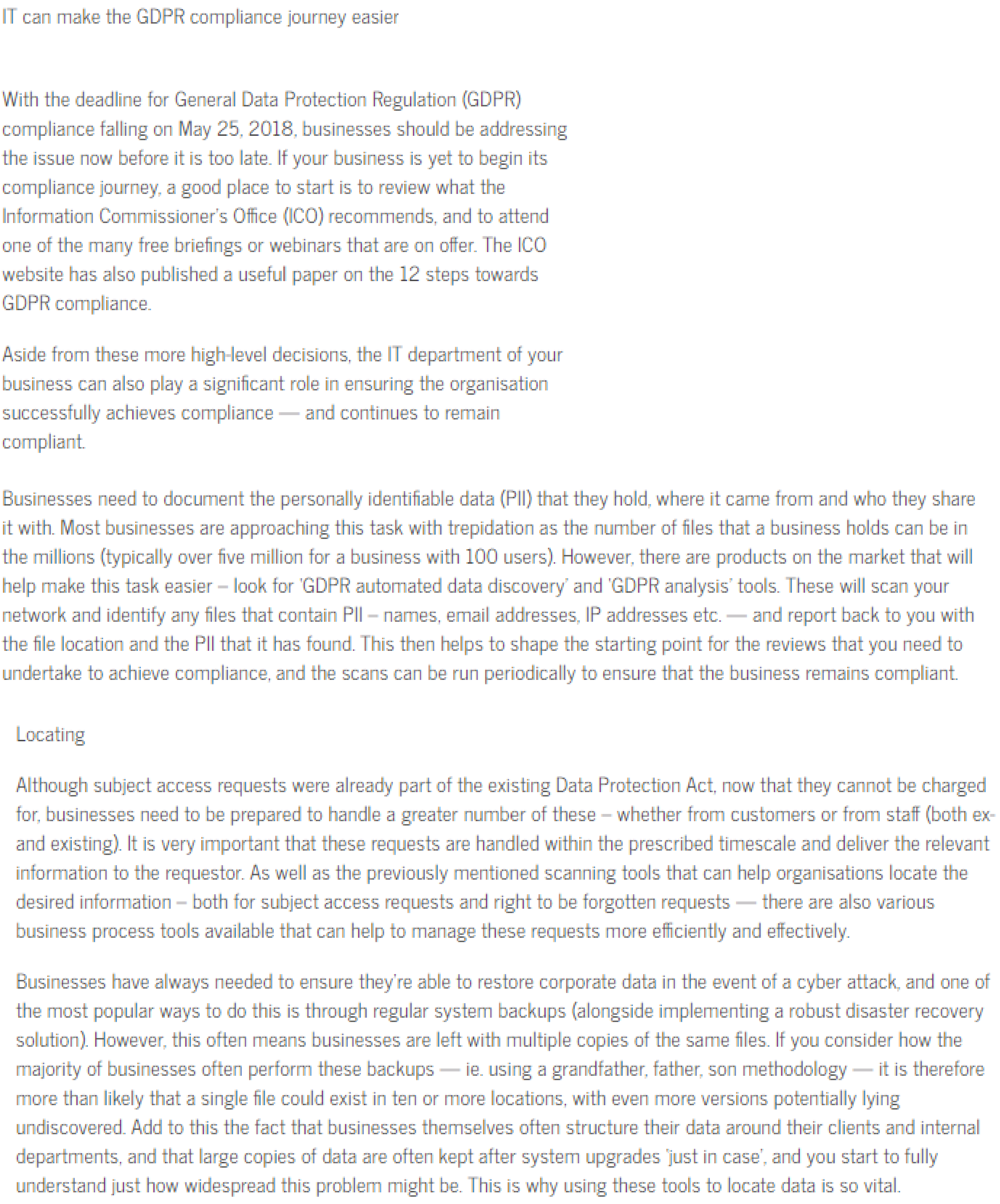
Professional
SECURITY
Magazine Online

GDPR compliance journey



IT can make the GDPR compliance journey easier

With the deadline for General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance falling on May 25, 2018, businesses should be addressing the issue now before it is too late. If your business is yet to begin its compliance journey, a good place to start is to review what the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) recommends, and to attend one of the many free briefings or webinars that are on offer. The ICO website has also published a useful paper on the 12 steps towards GDPR compliance.

Aside from these more high-level decisions, the IT department of your business can also play a significant role in ensuring the organisation successfully achieves compliance — and continues to remain compliant.

Businesses need to document the personally identifiable data (PII) that they hold, where it came from and who they share it with. Most businesses are approaching this task with trepidation as the number of files that a business holds can be in the millions (typically over five million for a business with 100 users). However, there are products on the market that will help make this task easier – look for 'GDPR automated data discovery' and 'GDPR analysis' tools. These will scan your network and identify any files that contain PII – names, email addresses, IP addresses etc. — and report back to you with the file location and the PII that it has found. This then helps to shape the starting point for the reviews that you need to undertake to achieve compliance, and the scans can be run periodically to ensure that the business remains compliant.

Locating

Although subject access requests were already part of the existing Data Protection Act, now that they cannot be charged for, businesses need to be prepared to handle a greater number of these – whether from customers or from staff (both ex- and existing). It is very important that these requests are handled within the prescribed timescale and deliver the relevant information to the requestor. As well as the previously mentioned scanning tools that can help organisations locate the desired information – both for subject access requests and right to be forgotten requests — there are also various business process tools available that can help to manage these requests more efficiently and effectively.

Businesses have always needed to ensure they're able to restore corporate data in the event of a cyber attack, and one of the most popular ways to do this is through regular system backups (alongside implementing a robust disaster recovery solution). However, this often means businesses are left with multiple copies of the same files. If you consider how the majority of businesses often perform these backups — ie. using a grandfather, father, son methodology — it is therefore more than likely that a single file could exist in ten or more locations, with even more versions potentially lying undiscovered. Add to this the fact that businesses themselves often structure their data around their clients and internal departments, and that large copies of data are often kept after system upgrades 'just in case', and you start to fully understand just how widespread this problem might be. This is why using these tools to locate data is so vital.

GDPR places an obligation on all businesses to detect, report and investigate personal data breaches, which are becoming more and more commonplace. 2017 alone was riddled with worrying stories of serious hacks on major businesses and organisations including the NHS, Uber and the Houses of Parliament, and this has led the majority of us to look inward at our own businesses and question whether we're taking the issue seriously enough. However, the IT department of a business can play a key role in preventing these breaches happening in the first place.

Data lies at the heart of GDPR, and so every possible effort should be made to protect any personally identifiable data your business holds. However, this can prove problematic — especially considering that IT infrastructures are so susceptible to vulnerabilities.
The stark truth is that there will be very few businesses who are sufficiently protected from the threat of cyber attacks, and so they must work on bolstering their defences if they are to stay out of the firing line. This involves looking at every aspect of a business' IT infrastructure, from security features of the hardware itself to ensuring that all confidential corporate data is protected from data breaches.

One of the most popular ways of plugging this gap is to introduce security solutions, such as vulnerability management tools, that can scan your IT infrastructure and identify known security vulnerabilities — the IT function will then upgrade operating systems and apply patches to fix these, therefore minimising the chances of a data breach. Or, there are numerous regulation management tools that can ensure compliance across an entire company rather than just a single team or department.

Conclusion

There seems to be a decidedly mixed reaction to the GDPR deadline creeping ever closer. Some seem to be overwhelmed by the prospect of change and struggle to understand where their compliance journey must begin, while others seem to simply bury their heads in the sand and hope that the storm passes over them. Yes, the issue of GDPR is serious and the repercussions of not complying are severe, but focusing on your IT systems and processes is a great way of starting your compliance journey.