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The Cloud Requires More Transparency

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TORONTO. Is the cloud more or less secure than traditional IT infrastructure?

That's a question that Jim Reavis, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Cloud Security Alliance (CSA), discussed at the SecTor security conference.

"It's not like we think that any outsourced cloud provider is less secure than our own infrastructure," Reavis said. "We want the same transparency."

The CSA is a non-profit organization with some 39,000 members worldwide and a focus on research, certification and standards. Reavis noted that it has taken almost 25 years to get a handle on PC security and he doesn't want it to take that long for the cloud.

"The informed consumer is a missing component in making cloud providers more transparent in terms of where their data is stored. The only way we'd be able to know and provide assurance that that appropriate service is being delivered."

Reavis argued that there needs to be a mindset that consumers have a right to know what cloud providers are doing with their data. "It's something that all cloud users need to ask for."

"We can't do it as individual companies, where we have less and less ability to influence a cloud provider," Reavis said. "We need to do it together."

In an effort to help provide some transparency, the CSA has conducted a number of Cloud Service Provider (CSP) surveys. In a recent survey, only 59 percent of cloud vendors were able to locate and search all customer data.

"The survey shows that there is a need for more prescriptive guidance on data discovery best practices," Reavis said.

The issue of the physical location of data is also an issue for some enterprises and industries. The CSA survey found that 73 percent of cloud providers said they could put data in specific locations. However, only 73 percent said they could technically do so while they can set up data for one geography, that data could potentially wander.

Going a step deeper, only 65 percent of Cloud Service Providers said they do location based backup. While 83 percent said they could provide end to end encryption.

Perhaps more surprising though were the findings about *data remanence*. Data remanence is about making data really deleted. According to the CSA, only 33 percent of Cloud Service Providers claimed that they delete data according to industry standard.

The Future of Cloud Standards

For Reavis and his organization, the future of the cloud is about real time continuous monitoring for standards compliance.

An initial step toward that goal is the CSA's Security Trust and Assurance Registry (STAR). STAR is a public registry of CSP security assessments.

"STAR is the form 10-k of cloud computing," Reavis said.

STAR will also be the foundation for a larger certification framework that CSA is aiming to roll out in 2013/14.

certifications.

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