

Security expert calls for cyber defense center for SMEs

The security effort is enormous when the annual Munich Security Conference takes place from February 14 to 16: More than 4,000 police officers provide protection for the participants, roadblocks and access gates do the rest. In comparison, the security of small and medium-sized businesses is criminally neglected. As a result, cyberattacks are causing massive damage to the German economy. Against the backdrop of the MSC, security expert Mirko Ross points out this emergency and calls for a national cyber defense center for SMEs to provide support.

The latest figures from the digital association Bitkom make people sit up and take notice: Cyber attacks caused total damage of just under 103 billion euros to German companies in 2019. This means that the damage is almost twice as high as in 2017. 75% of companies have been threatened by attacks in recent years, 13% suspect this. Experts also expect enormous losses for the economy in 2020, because the scope and quality of attacks are increasing dramatically.

SMEs without expert support

The security situation is particularly problematic for small and medium-sized enterprises. Unlike large companies, they cannot afford their own CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team). Nor are they supported by the BSI's Cyber Defense Center like authorities, institutions or companies that belong to the so-called critical infrastructure. "In the event of a cyber attack, medium-sized companies are usually left without expert backing," explains security expert Mirko Ross. "Even if a medium-sized company could raise considerable financial resources, it would probably not find suitable employees, because there are far too few competent experts to defend against cyber attacks."

Mirko Ross therefore calls for a national CERT that supports SMEs in defending against cyberattacks and provides active assistance in the event of attacks, similar to an emergency call. The model for this could be the Israeli cyber emergency number 119, which all citizens can call free of charge if they fear they are the victim of a hacker attack.

Active support for small and medium-sized enterprises

The effectiveness of the Israeli cyber emergency service was recently demonstrated when a bug in the programs of the Citrix remote maintenance software caused security breaches in customers' systems worldwide. According to a report in the weekly newspaper Die Zeit on Feb. 5, 2020, the BSI sent written warnings to about 5,000 affected network operators - without resounding success. Even a second letter did not bring the desired response - 1,500 networks still have security vulnerabilities. There were also several thousand affected Citrix customers in Israel. The Israeli CERT reacted with much more commitment and called every single user, sometimes several times. Within four weeks, all open systems had been secured.

Mirko Ross welcomes the IT security platform Cert@VDE, operated by the VDE, as a major step forward. However, the initiative only supports industrial SMEs in the field of automation. Therefore, cyber security expert Mirko Ross demands: "What we need is a national CERT that quickly and actively supports all self-employed and SMEs in the fight against cyber criminals. It doesn't matter whether a hacker has paralyzed the computer in the home office of a graphic designer or the production of a large bakery. For those affected, such attacks are a disaster that can quickly cost them their livelihood. The state must bundle forces and expertise centrally here and make them available to the economy." Expert Mirko Ross will be available on site and by telephone for questions and interviews on February 14 and 15 during the Munich Security Conference.

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Mirko Ross is an internationally recognized activist, expert, speaker, publicist and researcher in the field of cybersecurity and the Internet of Things. He is involved in IoT security as a member of the Expert Group on Internet of Things Security of the European Cyber Security Authority ENISA. In addition, Mirko Ross is active in international research projects in the field of cybersecurity and blockchain technologies and is founder and CEO of the start-up asvin and digital worx GmbH.

Image:



Portrait Mirko Ross, CEO asvin GmbH

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