

The Endpoint Security Checklist

for Small and Medium Businesses

Preventing Initial Compromise

The best defense against cyber attacks is to prevent attackers from gaining initial access to a machine in the first place.

VULNERABLE SOFTWARE

☐ Patch What You Can

When vulnerabilities are disclosed, it's only a matter of time before attackers begin exploiting them. Having a system in place to assess, test, and roll out patches is a vital first defense against attacks.

☐ Isolate What You Can't

Patching is vital, but not easy. Isolate systems you can't patch quickly by restricting network access.

EXPOSED PORTS & SERVICES

☐ Secure Remote Desktop (RDP)

Open ports with RDP exposed to the Internet are beacons for attackers. [Restrict access to RDP](#) listening ports by placing them behind a firewall and using a RDP Gateway. Enabling network-level authentication and changing the default listening port (TCP 3389) is also recommended.

☐ Secure Server Message Block (SMB)

Disable SMBv1 and use firewalls to [restrict SMB network activity](#). WannaCry and other attacks leveraging the EternalBlue exploit have shown just how vulnerable organizations become when exposing SMB.

EMAIL

☐ Block Common Malicious File Attachments

In addition to the obvious (.EXE, .BAT), [consider blocking](#) script files (.JS, .VBS, etc.), archive files (.ZIP, .SFX, .7z), and even Office files (.DOC, .DOCX, etc.) and PDFs.

☐ Conduct User Awareness Training

Many attacks still initially require users clicking something they shouldn't. Training and inform your end-users about attacks that rely on deception and social engineering.

BROWSERS

☐ Utilize Ad-Blockers

Even legitimate websites can serve as infection points thanks to malvertising.

MICROSOFT OFFICE

☐ Enforce Stricter Macro Controls

Block macros in Office files downloaded from the Internet. Macros are abused to download malware and launch malicious scripts.

☐ Disable "Update Automatic Links At Open" in Microsoft Word

[This](#) will prevent [abuse of the DDE feature](#) (now disabled by default) and similar threats.

☐ Disable OLE Packages

Considering the long history of attackers abusing Microsoft's object linking and embedding (OLE) feature, it's best [disabled when possible](#).

ALL OF THE ABOVE

☐ Use Barkly's Endpoint Protection Platform

Barkly prevents more attacks from successfully launching from any of these vectors. Learn more at barkly.com.

Mitigating Post-Exploitation Techniques

Once attackers have access to a machine, they can evade detection by using fileless techniques and legitimate system administration tools to do their dirty work.

WHEN POWERSHELL ISN'T NECESSARY

☐ **Disable It**

PowerShell is a powerful scripting framework that can provide attackers with a wide variety of dangerous functionality.

WHEN POWERSHELL IS NECESSARY

☐ **Update to Latest Version of PowerShell**

It provides additional logging and updates to security features that can otherwise be bypassed on older versions (specifically version 2).

☐ **Block Unsigned PowerShell Scripts**

While attackers can bypass this and other execution policy, attempts to do so can make attacks more visible.

☐ **Consider Using PowerShell Constrained Language Mode**

It [limits PowerShell to basic functionality](#), which will make many fileless attack techniques unusable.

☐ **Enable and Monitor Extended PowerShell Logging**

Just be prepared for this to generate a lot of events. Tools like [PowerShell Method Auditor](#) can help process them.

SECURE & UTILIZE WINDOWS MANAGEMENT INSTRUMENTATION (WMI)

☐ **Create Defensive Permanent WMI Event Subscriptions**

Its wide range of powerful admin capabilities make WMI a popular target of abuse, but they also make it a great tool for logging and responding to malicious activity. See examples [here](#) and [here](#).

☐ **If There's No Need for Remote WMI**

Consider [setting up a fixed port for WMI](#) and blocking it.

APPLY APPLICATION CONTROLS

☐ **Limit the Execution of Executables, DLLs, and Scripts with AppLocker**

[How restrictive you can be](#) with whitelisting will depend on your organization's needs.

☐ **Take Additional Steps to Harden AppLocker**

As with any security measure, there are ways of bypassing AppLocker. Learn how to [create rules to mitigate that risk](#).

APPLY LEAST PRIVILEGES & ACCESS CONTROLS

☐ **Exercise Least Privilege**

As best practice, users should be given the bare minimum of access and privileges necessary, limiting the damage they can do if compromised. Microsoft's [Just Enough Administration](#) can help.

☐ **When Possible, Use Highest UAC Enforcement Level**

That includes setting UAC to "always notify," which will trigger prompts whenever a program attempts to make changes to Windows settings or the machine (yes, this can be annoying).

☐ **Enable Admin Approval Mode**

It [enforces UAC](#) for the built-in Administrator, which can help thwart privilege escalation and lateral movement attempts.

☐ **Remove Users from the Local Administrators Group**

This can also help prevent privilege escalation attempts.

☐ **Disable Credential Caching**

[Don't allow storage of credentials](#) for network authentication. Anytime credentials are stored it presents attackers with an opportunity to grab them.

APPLY LEAST PRIVILEGES & ACCESS CONTROLS (CONTINUED)

- ☐ **Avoid Credential Overlap Across systems**
This can help prevent lateral movement opportunities if valid credentials are obtained.
- ☐ **Avoid Staying Logged In On Remote Systems**
Otherwise you open yourself up to attackers hijacking your admin access and privileges.
- ☐ **Disable Anonymous Login for Read and Write Access to Network File Shares (NFS)**
Open shares provide a pivot point or means to further further spread an attack to other users on the network.
- ☐ **Disable Anonymous Login for Read and Write Access to File Transfer Protocol (FTP):**
For the same reasons stated above for NFS.
- ☐ **Use Strong Passwords**
Should go without saying, but obviously still a major common problem.
- ☐ **Utilize 2FA When Possible**
Requiring two factor authentication can help keep attackers out even if they've successfully stolen passwords.
- ☐ **Apply Account Lockout Policies and/or Progressive Delays for Logins**
This can help thwart brute force attempts.

MONITOR FOR...

- ☐ **Changes In The Registry**
Hiding scripts in the registry is one of the most common ways attackers gain persistence. Using WMI subscription events and/or tools like [Sysinternals Autoruns](#) can help.
- ☐ **Suspicious WMI Activity**
Again, creating defensive WMI subscription events (examples [here](#) and [here](#)) can help.
- ☐ **Scheduled Task Creation**
Scheduled tasks can be used to achieve persistence and escalate privileges. Track creation with [PowerShell scripts](#).
- ☐ **Suspicious Processes and API Calls**
Monitoring for [specific calls](#) in the PowerShell operational log can provide strong indication of attacks. Using tools like [Sysinternals Process Explorer](#) and [Get-InjectedThreads](#) can also help.
- ☐ **Processes Being Spawned with the CREATE_SUSPENDED flag**
This is a good indication of process hollowing.



Don't just check the boxes.

The **Barkly Endpoint Protection Platform™** blocks fileless attacks, exploits, and file-based malware by analyzing behaviors and attributes in the set-up phase of an attack - before damage is done.

Find out more at barkly.com.