The Disadvantages of a Firewall

by Shea Laverty

Securing your business's data is one of the most important tasks your company can undertake to prevent fraud or theft. Intrusion prevention via firewall can be a solid line of defense between your company's network and hackers. However, a firewall should never be your company's only line of digital defense, as these tools have several failings in spite of their usefulness.

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Legitimate User Restriction

Firewalls are designed to restrict unauthorized data transmission to and from your network. Although this can safeguard your system from intrusion, it can also create considerable problems for your employees or coworkers. Firewall policies can be very restrictive and can limit users from performing legitimate operations. These restrictions can impede productivity and even prompt users to begin utilizing backdoor exploits to work around them. Using backdoor exploits limits the firewall's capability to secure your network, as data transmitted through these back doors is not filtered or examined at all.

Diminished Performance

Software-based firewalls have the added inconvenience of inhibiting your computer's overall performance. Software firewalls are constantly running and use processor power and RAM memory to perform their function. This uses resources that could be dedicated to other operations. The amount of performance reduction experienced varies on the specs of your network's servers or your employees' individual terminals. Hardware firewalls do not experience this issue, as they do not rely on a host computer's resources to function.

Vulnerabilities

Firewalls have a number of vulnerabilities. If strict policies result in heavy backdoor use by employees, attention may be called to these unprotected entry points and exploited. Also, firewalls only serve as a perimeter to block unauthorized data transmissions -- they don't provide anti-virus, anti-malware or anti-spyware capabilities. That means you'll need additional protection if this harmful software is accidentally introduced into the system through trusted channels like email. Firewalls also draw considerable attention from would-be intruders, becoming a focal point of attacks. Should an attempt to break through prove successful, your company's network is completely at the mercy of the intruder.

Internal Attack

Firewalls can be useful in repelling intrusions, but they offer no protection against sabotage. According to Joseph and Florence Kizza's "Securing the Information Infrastructure," most corporate computer crimes are perpetrated by users within the system -- essentially employees turned saboteurs. Firewalls cannot repel attacks of this kind, as the attacker already has trusted access to the company's network and resources.

Cost

Depending on the type of firewall you choose, you may see considerable investment -- especially on an enterprise scale. Software firewalls tend to be less expensive and easier to deploy, but require terminal resources. Hardware firewalls require purchase and installation for each network node, which in large-scale corporate networks can be costly depending on the firewalls purchased. You'll also need IT staff to install, configure and maintain the firewalls and oversee policy.

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