

Recently launched security certification gives cloud service customers new STAR to follow



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Organizations are increasingly moving to the cloud as an affordable and easily accessible alternative to internal IT systems. Government research has shown that this has promoted a large corporate adoption of the cloud as a repository for confidential data.

This form of remote data storage now represents the biggest use of cloud computing today; largely a consequence of technological developments in the workplace and a desire for employees to be able to work flexibly and remotely.

Although cloud adoption is gathering pace, many organizations remain wary of cloud services due to a variety of security concerns. Recent independent research indicates that as many as 51% of organizations are reluctant to migrate to the cloud for this reason.

These concerns appear founded. In the government's 2013 information security breaches survey, it was shown that 93% of large organizations and 87% of small businesses had a security breach in the last year. Despite only 4% of all breaches reported by respondents relating to one of their cloud computing services, given that only 23% get reports of breaches from their provider, it is likely that the actual breach levels are much higher.

Security risks to cloud users can take a variety of forms, encompassing everything from human error to malicious insiders, data loss or leakage to account or service hijacking. As many businesses use a third party to defend against such threats, the added

distance from security measures can make it more difficult to understand best practice.

In late 2013, BSI (British Standards Institution) and the Cloud Security Alliance (CSA), a not-for-profit cloud industry association, worked together to launch the CSA STAR Certification scheme, comprising an independent third-party assessment of the security capabilities of cloud service providers.

The certification scheme is designed to create transparency in the industry, helping business to evaluate the performance of a cloud service provider. It also offers reassurance to users that specific cloud security risks have been addressed.

The new certification leverages the requirements of the global ISO/IEC 27001 information security management system standard, together with the CSA's Cloud Control Matrix – a set of security measures created by the Cloud Security Alliance to help enterprises assess the risk associated with a cloud computing provider.

To qualify for certification, each cloud service provider has to achieve ISO/IEC 27001 certification and meet minimum standards when assessed against the additional controls in the Cloud Control Matrix.

This assessment covers compliance, data governance, facility security, human resources, information security, legal, operations management, risk management, release management, resiliency and security architecture. Each control area in the Cloud Control Matrix is scored on a maturity scale to produce an overall maturity score.

ISO/IEC 27001 provides the requirements for an information security management system and uses a top-down, risk-based approach, and is technology-neutral.

The internal report issued as part of the scheme will show cloud and data center providers how mature their processes are and highlight areas they need to consider improving to reach an optimum level of maturity.

In the UK, HP and Pulsant are the first cloud service providers to be assessed globally to this new scheme.

Fergus Kennedy, head of compliance and information systems at Pulsant said the certification offers a path to improvement: "And, because it is audited by an independent body, it holds infinitely more weight than existing self-assessment/self-declaration models," he said.

While Gursharan Viridi, UK ISO 27001 programme manager, HP comments: "This certification provides further assurance to our UK government customers that we have gone the additional mile."

By achieving the CSA STAR Certification, cloud service providers of all sizes will be able to give prospective customers a greater understanding of their levels of security controls. In addition, the new scheme will provide customers themselves with a clear benchmark on which to evaluate the performance of a particular cloud service provider.

For more information, visit www.bsigroup.com/STAR

