

# COVID distractions can cause vulnerability

For the past couple summers, the debate over in-person versus at home schooling has been a constant topic.

Everyone seems to have an opinion, but no one has a one-size-fits-all answer. Some will argue safety from the virus. Others focus on the mental wellbeing of children. From my standpoint, it seems like they are all right-ish, but finding a balance is a nearly impossible task and a constant distraction for school decision makers.

As that battle wages on, hackers have begun to target schools. Why? Because they are distracted. The all-consuming task of finding the right solution has left educational institutions vulnerable. Surely, the people deciding the best course for children, teachers and families are not the same people protecting the technology infrastructure, right? Yes, that is right. Although, the person tasked with protecting the infrastructure isn't likely the sole person who can make all decisions, they have a boss. That boss is not going to prioritize the computers and networks while a thousand parents are complaining from one side of the fence or another. That boss is distracted. The information-technology (IT) staff will do their best, but they need buy in from the top.

Schools are only one of many distracted and at-risk institutions. Hospital systems are working to keep up. Government agencies are focused on fighting the pandemic, helping the unemployed and providing businesses with what they need to keep afloat.

Obviously, those businesses are distracted



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as well. They can't hire, they can't get materials and equipment, sales are fluctuating. They're just trying to stay afloat. Everyone is distracted.

Hackers see this environment as a pick-pocket sees a street magic show. Opportunity.

Social media doesn't help. We're all so preoccupied arguing the politics of a pandem-

ic that we've forgotten to live our lives, appreciate our friends and families and take precautions. We are completely occupied with a spoon-fed narrative by all sides that we stopped taking care of ourselves. What was important in 2019 is still important whether we pay attention to it or not. In many cases, it's even more important.

There are things we can do to secure our data and protect ourselves that will not take a lot of time or money.

Good backups, multi-factor authentication, dark-web monitoring and cyber-awareness training are at the top of that list.

I just spoke with our insurance broker and those protections are the things that big cyber insurance companies are looking for.

IT companies work in tandem with cyber insurance companies and cyber enhancement services. They can secure your data, but as long as you have employees, nothing is ever truly secure. Employees click on things that they shouldn't, and they also get distracted and fall for expertly manufactured campaigns designed specifically to trick people.

Employees will always be the biggest security risk in a company and no IT provider, whether internal or external, can fully protect you through support alone.

That's where good cyber policies and systems come into play. Like a good disaster recovery plan, we all work together to prevent disasters, not just recover from them.

Nothing is as bad as it seems. Your network isn't as bad as you've been told, and you don't have to spend a fortune to protect your-

self. However, you do have to protect yourself.

One day soon, the pandemic will be all over, and we will have a whole new batch of things to worry about. My advice is to put down your phone and take a look long look at the real world around you. You have real-world work to do.

Here are things you need to focus on:

1. Offsite data backups
2. Multi-factor authentication
3. Dark web monitoring
4. Cyber awareness training for employees
5. Cyber insurance
6. Secure network infrastructure.

Similar to antivirus, a modern firewall is still amongst the best things you can do to secure your data and ensure your business is operational.

Items one through five are relatively new. While they are as important as six, they do not replace the need for six, a good firewall.

This has been a tough couple of years. No one blames you for feeling frustrated. You're not alone in feeling numb or for wanting to hide under a rock until all this craziness passes. Most of what is going on around you is out of your control and often is being sensationalized. Accept that and look to the things that you can do to protect yourself and your business.

Scott Tornio is president of HawkPoint Technologies.

## Mid-year report shows state banks faring well

Wisconsin's 135 state-chartered banks continue to exhibit strong financial performance as of June 30, according to data released by the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (DFI).

State-chartered banks' total assets increased more than \$4.9 billion from June 30, 2020, and stand at more than \$66.9 billion through June 30, 2021.

While the extension of the COVID-19 pandemic's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans combined with the low interest rate environment has put pressure on the net interest margin, decreasing from 3.51 percent in June of 2020, it held steady from first quarter at 3.37 percent.

Net loans have decreased 1.23 percent from June of 2020, down \$546.3 million, due, in part, to PPP loans being forgiven or paid down.

In the 12 months ending on June 30, 2021:

- The capital ratio remained strong at 10.92 percent compared to 11.02 percent in June of 2020.

- The past due ratio declined to 0.85 percent from early pandemic levels when the ratio was 1.22 percent in June of 2020.

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- Net operating income was over \$463.7 million compared to \$346.2 million in June of 2020. The return on average assets ratio was 1.44 percent and has increased from 1.23 percent in June of 2020 in part due to strong asset performance and continued secondary market refinance fee income.

- Bank liquidity has been strong putting pressure on the loans to assets ratio at 65.74 percent compared to more normal liquidity levels earlier in the pandemic of 71.82 percent in June of 2020.

“Wisconsin's state-chartered banks have continued to demonstrate sound financial practices while helping their communities through the economic impacts of the pandemic,” said DFI Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld “Overall, Wisconsin's state-chartered banks are financially stable and have adjusted to their changing circumstances while working with their customers to meet their financial needs.”

### Nicolet Bank completes acquisition of mBank

Green Bay-based Nicolet Bankshares Inc., the parent company of Nicolet National Bank, completed its acquisition of Mackinac Financial Corp., parent company of mBank, on Sept. 3. mBank had 28 branches in Northcentral Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The \$248 million acquisition brings Nicolet's consolidated assets to about \$6.1 billion.

With the acquisition, Nicolet said 15 branches are in line for consolidation or closure. The branches affected will be a mix of mBank and Nicolet branches in Northcentral Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula.

### Women's Leadership Conference is Oct. 7

Topics affecting women in the workforce will be central to the Women's Leadership Conference held in person and online on Oct. 7 at the KI Convention Center in Green Bay.

The conference features sessions, panel dis-

cussions and keynote presentations from experienced leaders with content focused on leadership development, career advancement and wellbeing.

This year, the conference features three keynote speakers:

- Former Google and Facebook executive Marissa Orr will speak on The Power of Defining your own Success.

- Nada Lena Nasserdeen will address transformative leadership from the inside out. She is the founder and CEO of Rise Up For You, a college professor, and former top executive for an education corporation.

- Conference founder Vicki Updike will speak about women knowing their value and how a paycheck alone does not define women's contributions. Updike is an author, speaker, coach and the owner of New Sage Strategies LLC. She is the former CEO of Silver Star Brands and was recently the co-chair of The New North.

The conference begins with registration at 7:30 a.m. and concludes with a cocktail reception beginning at 4:15 p.m.

Visit <https://womensleadershipwi.com> for more information. To register, go to <https://womensleadershipwi.com/registration/>.