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Data breaches and the erosion of consumer trust in brands

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You remember Chicken Little, the dumb cluck who convinced his gullible barnyard buds that the sky was falling when an acorn thumped his head?

But do you recall how the fable ends with Foxy Loxy luring them all into his lair for dinner?

Moral of the story: This world is filled with real and imagined dangers and our job is to sort them out.

Fishing for trouble

I want talk to you about a real danger, a seriously sinister Foxy Loxy known as the "spear phisher."

Our personal success as marketers, the success of our individual companies and, indeed, our entire ecosystem for digital communication and commerce is predicated on one thing: trust.

Trust is the cornerstone of all we do from when consumers entrust their data to us in the belief that we will safeguard and use it consistent with their desires, to the trust relationships that exist between our companies and the partners, service providers and Internet service providers we routinely rely on.

Trust is central to all we do in email today. And it will be even more important as we move into a communication environment that is increasingly mobile, cross-channel and interactive, where data must be captured, transmitted and applied in real time.

Fundamentally, the preservation of trust and our future success depends on a safe and secure messaging environment. That is what makes the insidious nature of the spear phishing attacks against enterprises and service providers alike so disconcerting.

This Foxy Loxy is smart and operates with an insider's knowledge of how our ecosystem works. He knows the roles and relationship between us, and attacks one of us to get at another whoever might be the ultimate holder of what he is after.

What is more, he makes clever use of our own marketing tactics relevancy and personalization to induce us to open his malicious emails and achieve his criminal ends.

And, yes, marketers, or those that support the marketing function, are often the ones who fall victim, exposing their company, its systems and valuable data assets to compromise.

I know security is not a topic marketers like to think about. It is not in our DNA.

Our jobs are about generating revenue and building customer relationships, and our organizations are optimized

around those goals, not risk mitigation.

But I would suggest our jobs and goals are directly at risk.

If you think I am Chicken Little in over-dramatizing the risk, think again.

In the breach

This year has been dubbed the "Year of the Breach" for good reason the incidents you have read about are only a fraction of those that have occurred.

Put aside the monetary and brand damage done to victimized companies for a minute.

Instead, think about how these attacks are subverting our trust relationships and what that potentially means an erosion of the trust that consumers have in the companies they do business with and an unwillingness to share the data that makes digital communication work.

Or equally devastating, an erosion of the trust we have in each other as partners in this ecosystem and an inability to effectively work together. These are the things that are really at risk.

That is why safe and secure messaging is critically important to us and no longer an issue we can dismiss as something for our IT departments to worry about.

It is our issue tied to achieving our goals of revenue generation and relationship building.

As marketers, we must make it central to how we think, plan and operate, and become its most vocal champions.

And it does not matter where we fit in this ecosystem. Whether Henny Penny, Cocky Lockey or Goosey Loosey, we all have a vested interest in ridding our environment of Foxy Loxy and keeping the sky from falling. In my next installment tomorrow, I will talk about how.

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