

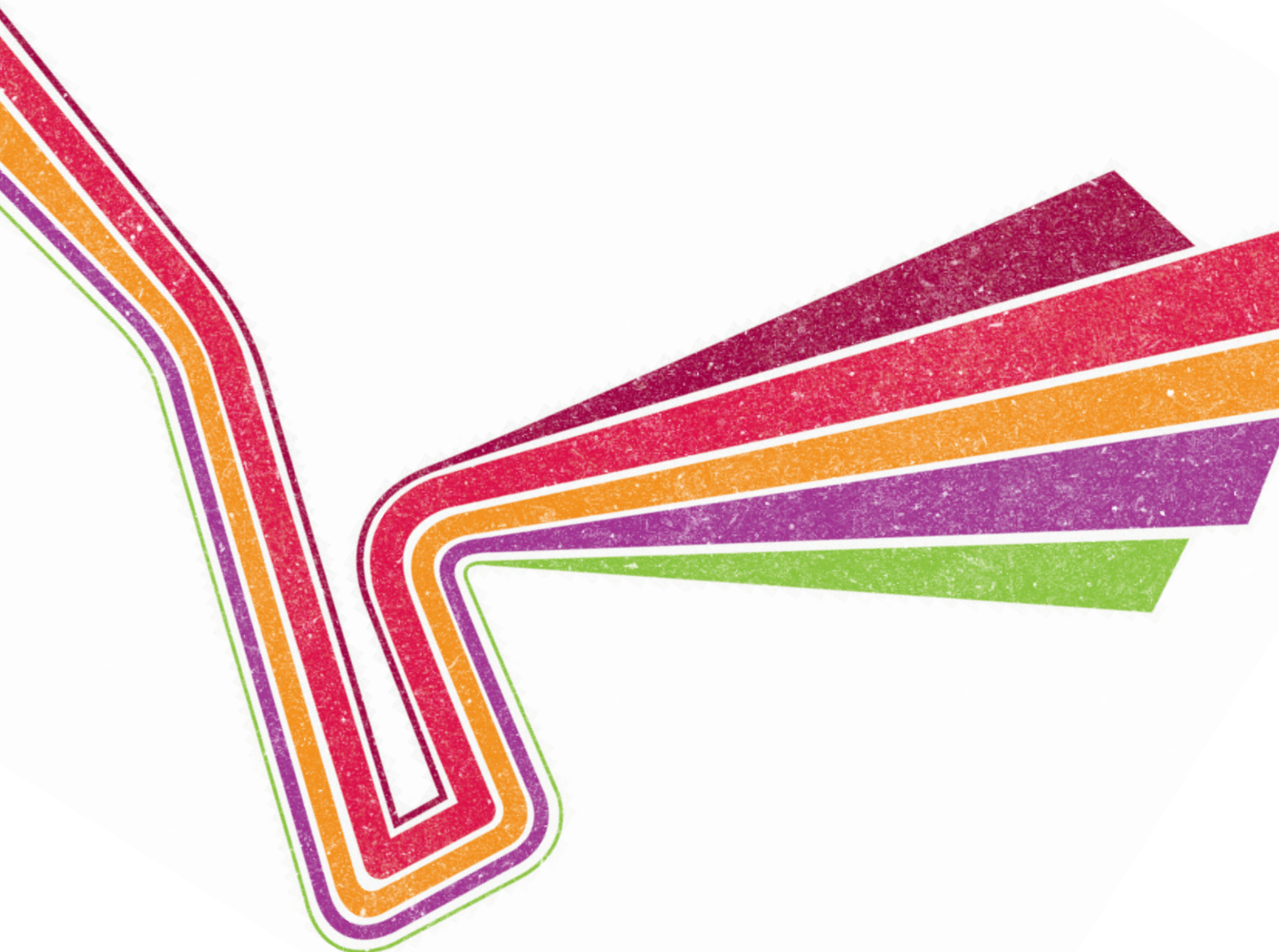


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Cyber Security Top Tip 4

Security Assessments



Security assessments can take many different forms and it is important for the organisation to understand them, the differences between them and what they will deliver in terms of value to supporting the Cyber Security strategy.

Firstly, let's clear up an often misunderstood point. Vulnerability scanning and penetration testing aren't the same thing. Vulnerability scanning is an automated process, a click button action which will automatically scan IP addresses for vulnerabilities using a database list of known issues. Whereas Penetration Testing is more manual in its nature, often supported by a scan, but it allows for flexibility and the skills of the 'ethical hacker' to be used in determining how to break in, much as a real life burglar will assess your home before choosing which window offers the easiest way in.

One can certainly support the other. Scanning is a quick, cheap and relatively easy way to see if there are any obvious issues in your network; perhaps a system that hasn't been patched and updated. It should be performed on a regular periodic basis to ensure that changes to the network are picked up.

A penetration test should be designed to meet specific objectives and key risks that have been identified during the risk assessment process. For example, used to identify the threat of what a rogue employee could achieve. A few years ago I was asked to simulate this very scenario. I was given access to a normal PC and a standard logon that would be handed to a temp and then was allowed to see what I could achieve and by lunchtime on the first day I had the password for the IT Director and full control of the network. This was not only a considerable wake up call for the organisation, but also allowed them to identify issues that needed to be fixed. An automated scan would not have achieved the same thing.

But it isn't just technical testing that needs to be considered, in supporting the cyber security strategy many risks can be effectively managed by performing a security audit or review.

For example, your risk might be that your IT administrators are being targeted, which is often the case. A review of the administrative accounts and auditing processes for those accounts might highlight controls which if implemented would reduce the probability of the risk occurring. For example a standard control would be limiting administrators' use of privileged accounts to only when they need to make specific changes to the network. These accounts should also be attributable to specific individuals and not just using the 'Administrator' account. None of this is a one size fits all approach and all organisations should consider the risks that are specific to them, remember, effective Cyber Security is a journey not a destination.

Minimise the threat of cyber attacks to your organisation.

Call Matthew Parker for a consultation.



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