

WHITE PAPER

Is Internet Access a Threat to the Company?

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IDC OPINION

The answer to the question "Is Internet access a threat to the company?" is a qualified "yes". This is documented by a survey of 200 Danish companies carried out by IDC.

The survey gave us two very important and significant findings:

- The biggest risk of viruses or worms is the employees' browsing of the Internet. Almost every fourth company has experienced a virus or worm from the Internet.
- In companies where private use of the Internet is allowed, the risk of an infection through the Internet is 3 – 3 1/2 times higher than in companies that does not allow private use of the Internet

So, why do more than 85% of Danish companies allow their employees to use the Internet for private purposes? We assume that in some cases, companies are not fully aware of the risks they are taking with this policy – but in other cases it is considered part of an open company policy to allow employees "freedom with responsibility".

But it does not remove the responsibilities for the company dealing with the attacks that can come from the Internet – and from the private use of the Internet at work. Companies need to proactively address the threats – including the ones coming through private use of the Internet. In many cases the solutions is probably not a band on the private use of the Internet but more likely a better monitoring and management of the use of the Internet.

INFECTIONS FROM THE INTERNET

As each year passes, enterprise awareness and perception of security and its cost to protect networks, data, applications, and communications rise. Yet, still the enterprise struggles with preventing the onslaught of viruses, employee error, hackers, and other troubles that jeopardize the physical and financial health of an enterprise.

In a new survey of Danish companies carried out by IDC Nordic it was revealed that 39% of the companies surveyed have had an infection in the form of a virus or a worm in the company within the past year.

This may even be a conservative estimate as companies often are inclined to avoid full exposure of the issues of security breaches for obvious reasons. A recent survey of American companies have shown that more than 40% of companies had a virus or worm over the past 12 months and another survey of Nordic companies published in

September 2005 showed about 50% of companies having been exposed to a successful virus or worm.

So, it is no surprise that viruses, trojans, worms, and malicious software reign supreme on the list of what threatens the security of an enterprise.

A lot of attention has been given to the danger of emails and how companies can get viruses, worms and other malicious attacks through the use of emails by employees.

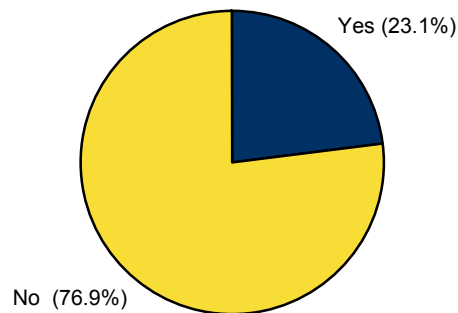
This Danish survey therefore shows a very significant fact: The biggest threats does not just come from the use of email but also from the use of the Internet (employees browsing Web sites).

20% of companies report that they have had a virus/worm infection through the use of email, but more – 23% – report that they have had an infection through browsing the Internet.

For large companies the threat seems to be higher than for smaller companies. More than 30% of companies with more than 500 employees report infections through the use of the Internet while more than 25% of the same companies report infections through the use of email.

FIGURE 12

Has the company had a virus or worm in the past 12 months because of an employee's use of the Internet

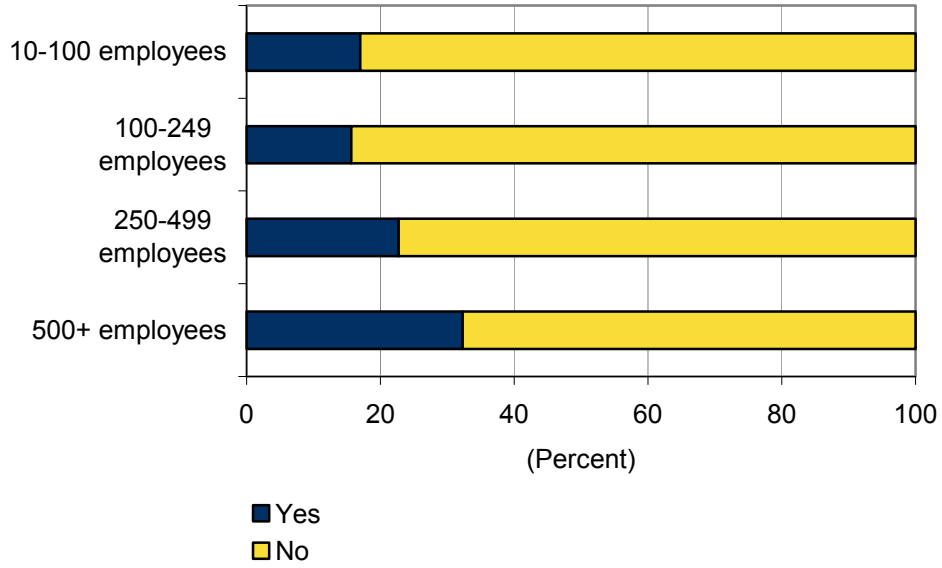


Note: N = 200

Source: IDC, 2006

FIGURE 13

Has the company had a virus or worm in the past 12 months because of an employee's use of the Internet by size of company

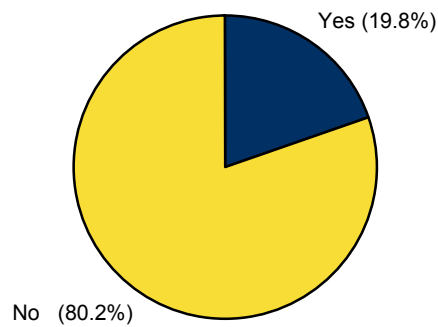


Note: N = 200

Source: IDC, 2006

FIGURE 16

Has the company had a virus or worm in the past 12 months because of an employee's use of email



Note: N = 202

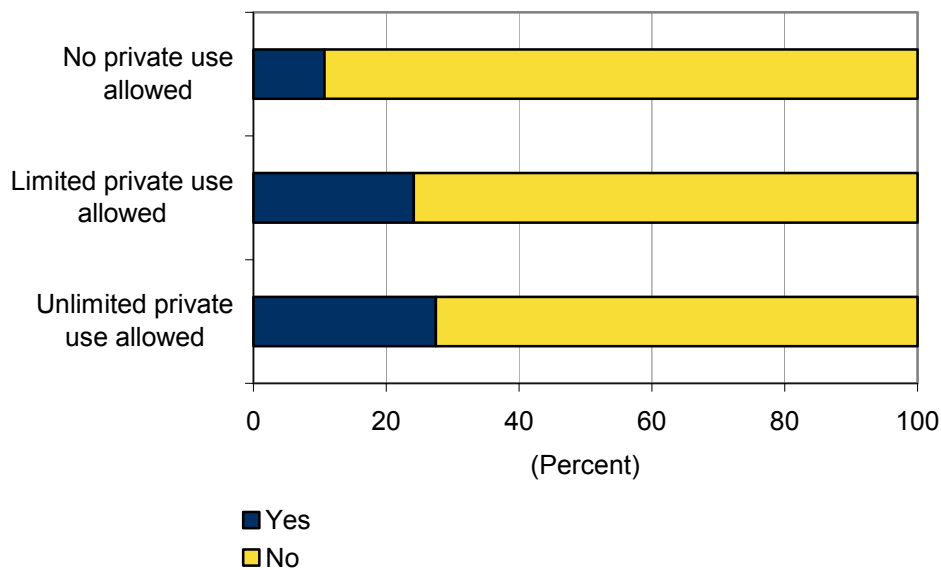
Source: IDC, 2006

INFECTIONS FROM PRIVATE USE OF THE INTERNET

The conclusion is very clear: Employees browsing the Internet is a significant risk to the company or organization, having a high probability of giving an infection. In order to understand this better, we have looked at the relationship between private use of the corporate Internet and the risk of getting an infection from this.

FIGURE 15

Has the company had a virus or worm in the past 12 months because of an employee's use of the Internet by private Internet access



Note: N = 200

Source: IDC, 2006

The high risk of getting infections through the use of the Internet might not be that controversial if infections from the Internet were primarily through work related use of the Internet. But the facts are different.

This survey shows that there is a direct correlation between private use of the Internet in companies and the risk of getting an infection through employee's use of the Internet. In companies where employees are allowed unlimited private use of the Internet, the risk of Internet infections is more than 3 times higher than in companies where employees are not allowed to use the Internet for private purposes!

In companies where private use of the Internet is allowed only to a limited effect, the risk of an Internet infection is still higher – a factor of 2.5 – compared again to companies with no private use of the Internet allowed.

INTERNET POLICIES

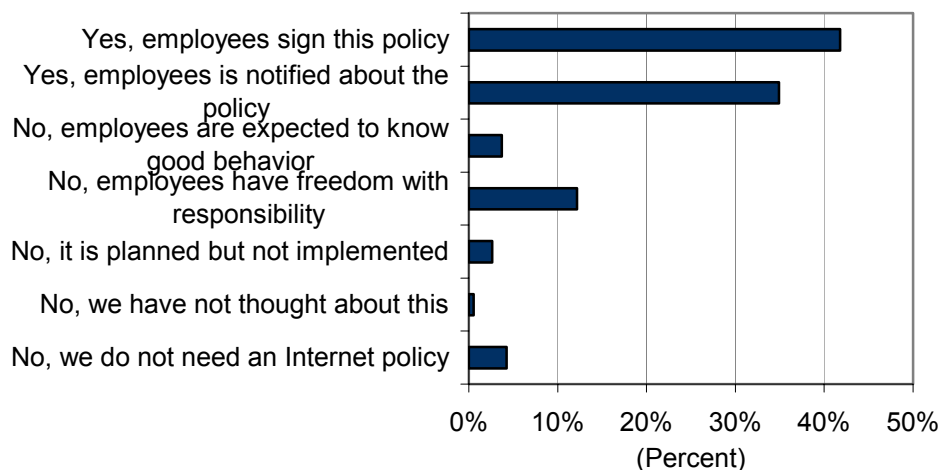
It is evident from the above that the threat picture for viruses and worms is highly related to private browsing through the corporate Internet. So, it is quite important the companies have a policy for this. And as it turns out, Danish companies at large do have Internet policies in their companies – however, they are still quite relaxed about allowing their employees to use the Internet for private purposes.

Companies have an Internet policy – about 75% of all companies. More than 40% of companies even have their employees sign the Internet policy while about 35% of companies notify the employees in other ways.

The remaining 25% of companies do not have an Internet policy. Most of them have taken a direct decision that they want to trust their employees who generally work as "responsible employees". Only a small fraction of companies have not considered the question about an Internet policy at all.

FIGURE 8

Do your company have an Internet policy



Note: N = 192

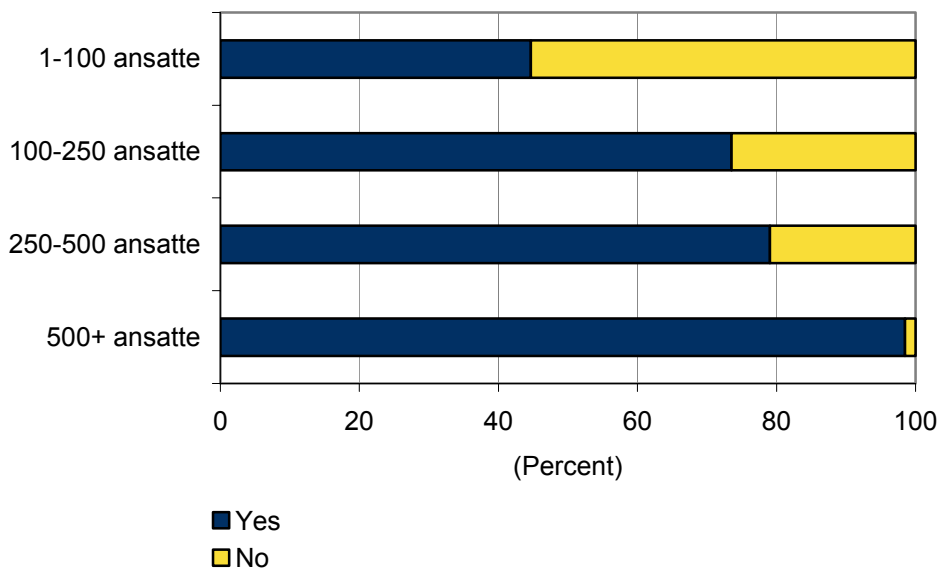
Source: IDC, 2006

There is a clear correlation between size of company and Internet policies. For large companies almost 100% have an Internet policy while this share drops to the smaller companies. Less than 50% of companies with less than 100 employees have a stated Internet policy.

Public organizations also stick out in this area as the vertical segment with a high penetration of Internet policies. About 90% of public organizations have an Internet policy for the employees.

FIGURE 9

Do your company have an Internet policy by size of company



Note: N = 192

Source: IDC, 2006

ALLOWING PRIVATE USE OF THE INTERNET

So, the good news is that Danish companies generally have considered having an Internet policy and most even have a policy on using the Internet written down.

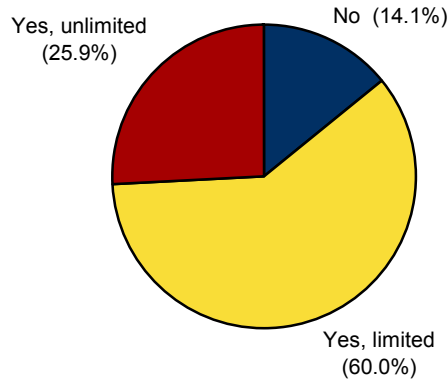
Still, we found a very flexible attitude with regard to allowing employees to access the corporate Internet for private purposes. Only 14% of companies do not allow employees to use the Internet for private purposes while the remaining 86% allow private use of the Internet. Most of the companies allowing private use of the Internet state that the use is "limited", but it is still significant that one in four companies allow "unlimited" private use of the Internet.

Small companies have the highest share allowing unlimited private use of the Internet. 40% of companies with less than 100 employees allow the employees to use the company Internet unlimited for private purposes. For companies with more than 500 employees the share is about 15%.

For the vertical segments analyzed in this study, services companies and the public sector have the highest shares of companies allowing unlimited private use of the Internet.

FIGURE 5

May employees use the Internet for private purposes

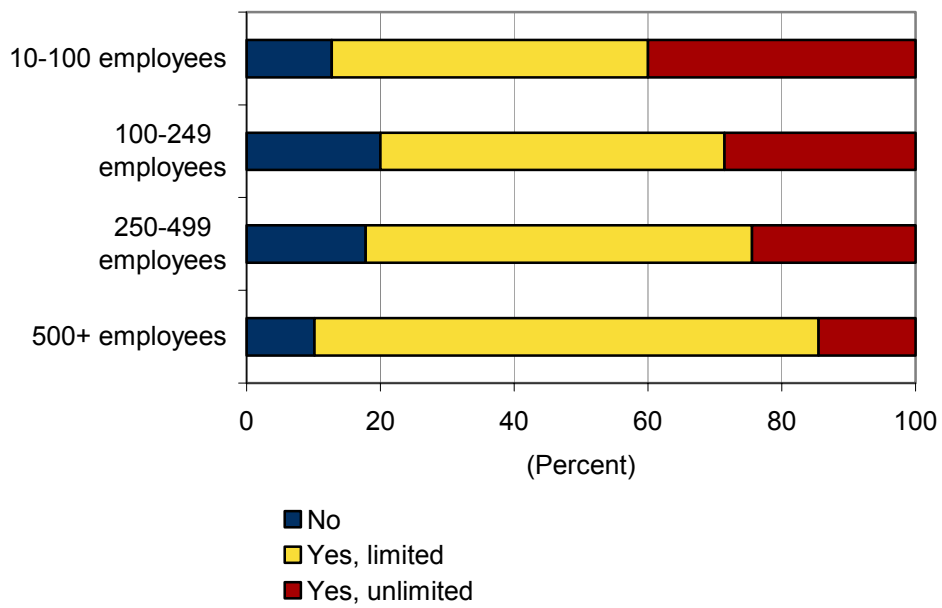


Note: N = 205

Source: IDC, 2006

FIGURE 6

May employees use the Internet for private purposes by company size



Note: N = 205

Source: IDC, 2006

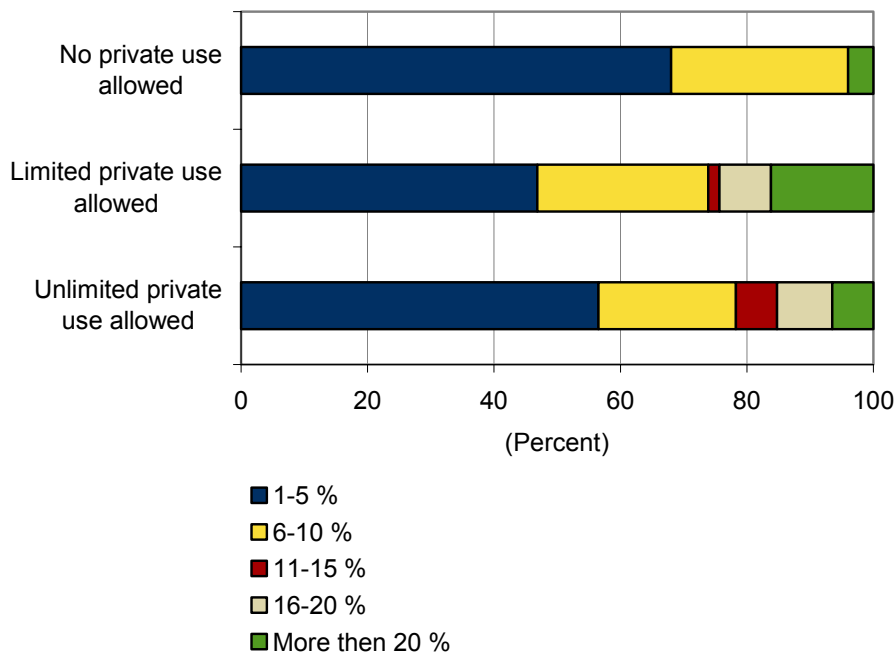
The next question is, whether the – rather few – companies that have an Internet policy that includes that employees may not use the Internet for private purposes are safe?

Well, obviously nobody is entirely safe, but things are not improved by the fact, that even companies with a "no private use" policy still assume that their employees use the Internet privately. This is evident from the survey. An astonishing 30% of the companies with a "no private use" policy expect that their employees nevertheless use the Internet on average at least 6% of their time for private surfing!

This means that the exposure to virus and worms through the private use of the Internet is not just a fact in companies with a free policy of private use of the Internet, but we can also expect that even companies that have a "no private use" policy are exposed through the employee's private use of the Internet.

FIGURE 27

Which share of employee use of the Internet do you think is used for private browsing by policy on private use



Note: N = 205

Source: IDC, 2006

About 40% of companies indicate that they have registered use of the Internet that violated corporate policies – which is not surprising given the fact that so many companies have realized that employees use the Internet for private purposes in spite of the policies stated to them

CONCLUSION

IDC's survey of 200 Danish companies reveals a clear message to the market:

Not only is the employees' use of the Internet one of the most prevailing sources for virus/worm infections to the company, but private use of the corporate Internet increases the risk of infections significantly.

Still, probably for many reasons, Danish companies are very relaxed about private browsing of the Internet by their employees. In many cases this is actually allowed by the company policy. In other cases it is not allowed, but companies recognize that their employees nevertheless use the Internet for private browsing.

We do not believe that companies realize the risk they take by allowing private use of the Internet. On the other hand, most companies probably does not know the entire extent of private use and which private sites are being visited by the employees.

There are solutions to this problem. One obvious solution is to band private use of the Internet using the corporate Internet. The problems with this solution are several: It does not necessarily stop the private browsing in the company – and more importantly it may be in contradiction to the general attitude of Danish companies with a high degree of freedom to their employees.

Another solution is to monitor the actual use of the Internet and react to this. This solution has several advantages. The sheer fact that employees know that their use of the Internet is monitored (whether collectively or on the personal level) is going to be the best regulation possible – it will even sort out some of the most malicious sites while more harmless private sites can still be defended. Another advantage is that it increases the knowledge in the company about the actual use of the Internet (extent, sites) and therefore can form an important foundation for rules, regulations and policies.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a survey of 200 Danish companies with more than 10 employees. 205 companies were interviewed during the month of May 2006.

Interviews were stratified according to sector (private or public) and size of company as shown in table 1.

Respondents are primarily IT managers of the company. In some cases we have been referred to another person in the company with more knowledge about Internet usage, and this person has then been interviewed instead.

With the sample size used, the accuracy of the results expressed in percentage of sample is typically plus/minus 4-6%.

TABLE 1

Sample stratification

	Number of companies	Share
Public, including health	45	22%
Private, 10-100 employees	40	20%
Private, 100-249 employees	41	20%
Private, 250-499 employees	39	19%
Private, 500+ employees	40	20%
Total	205	100%

Source: IDC, 2006

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