

Mitchell Audritsh discusses the security measures companies big and small should be taking

Mitchell Audritsh helps companies avoid the kind of terrorism that last week toppled Manhattan's Twin Towers. He previously was an economic analyst with the Central Intelligence Agency and then did similar work for the defense industry. Three years ago, he relocated to New Jersey to do market assessment work for Lucent Technologies, and he has recently done the same for Nortel. He is an independent consultant offering competitive assessments and security management services.

BUSINESS NEWS: How does a company protect itself against something like this?

Audritsh: Prudence and preparation. They must think through what could theoretically happen to them and what steps they need to take in order to mitigate the damage that could occur. You can't prevent random acts of violence, but you can respond with preestablished steps. It obviously varies if you are a power generating facility or a Dunkin' Donuts franchise.

BUSINESS NEWS: Is security primarily a big-company problem?

Audritsh: No. There were Krispy Kreme franchises in the mall under the World Trade Center that were just as much subject to this as any large corporation.

BUSINESS NEWS: How can you convince a small company to spend scarce resources on security?

Audritsh: The biggest thing is to decide what there is about your company that is so valuable that to lose it would threaten your business viability. It might be as simple, and inexpensive, as storing valuable documents in safer locations. The company may be doing this already to protect itself against normal disasters like fires. It may be inconvenient every Friday to go through the exercise of making an updated copy of your documents and putting it in a safe location, but it's necessary.

BUSINESS NEWS: It sounds like inconvenience may be the highest cost?

Audritsh: It is, because it runs against doing what you want to do in your business. That's why it's very difficult to take security measures, particularly in times of complacency.

BUSINESS NEWS: What are the steps that any company should take?

Audritsh: First, determine what is valuable. It's your employees, your physical plant and your intellectual property. What could happen if any of those are threatened? Then, design steps to protect them. It may be something as simple as locking the front door, or it may involve passing out badges that everyone must wear. It may involve things like need-to-know access to information. Protection comes with a cost, so it's a balancing act.

BUSINESS NEWS: Every company's future now seems to be tied to what is inside its computers. How do you protect that?

Audritsh: Are things backed up? Probably 98% of desktop-computer users don't back up. You also have to re-



"Telecom companies often have a lackadaisical, almost cavalier attitude toward rudimentary security."

alize that network computing is not secure. Assume that anything you send via email can be accessed by anyone. It could be sitting on a computer anywhere on earth.

BUSINESS NEWS: How do you protect your people?

Audritsh: Educate them that they can sometimes be targets, especially in a global company. Let people know that they can become targets in an attack on the company. That's what happened at the World Trade Center. The terrorists attacked the icon of our financial strength. Also, security problems for your people usually happen from within, so check them out before you hire them.

BUSINESS NEWS: Will this event have a major impact on corporate security?

Audritsh: I hope so. What we've seen in counter-terrorism in public policy has been that an event happens, radical proposals are made and then set aside in favor of mundane responses. That's what corporations often do. After looking at the cost-benefit tradeoff, they take the cheap and easy route.

BUSINESS NEWS: How much should a company be spending on security?

Audritsh: Security protection costs one amount for a nuclear power plant and another amount if all you're doing is locking up your paper documents. It's a function of the nature of a business operation.

BUSINESS NEWS: Two of the biggest industries in New Jersey are telecommunications and pharmaceuti-

als. How secure are they?

Audritsh: The pharmaceutical industry recognizes that the lifeblood of its success is its intellectual property. Drive by any of the pharma facilities, and it's like driving past any of the national intelligence compounds. The telecommunications industry is very different. People in telecommunications think that since change is so radical and so swift, measures to protect information are acts of futility. That's a misguided view of the benefits of rapidly changing technology. Telecommunications companies often have a lackadaisical, almost cavalier attitude toward rudimentary security.

BUSINESS NEWS: Could the World Trade Center disaster have been avoided? The terrorists reportedly were wielding cardboard-box cutters.

Audritsh: Once they're on the place, the horse is out of the barn. I don't know if this could have been avoided without really changing the balance between the benefits of security protection and the costs of it. You can build pyramids that will withstand every attack, but at what cost? There are tradeoffs.

BUSINESS NEWS: What will be the long-term effect of this event?

Audritsh: This may prompt a revisit of the way the federal government organizes its intelligence. That's where the battle has to be waged. It's not at the level of the minimum-wage person who's waving the x-ray gun at an airport security check.

BUSINESS NEWS: That means infiltration of groups and other clandestine measures?

Audritsh: It's letting the intelligence community do what it does well. g