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KEY CHANNEL PARTNER OF THE MONTH

AXIS

PAYROLL

6 Reasons to be Optimistic About Cybersecurity for Small Business

Businesses can stay alert to cyber threats while feeling reassured by broader trends in technology, talent, and other areas.

I'm a chief information security officer, but I like to replace the word "officer" with "optimist" when thinking about how much progress we've made in understanding, resisting, and recovering from cyberattacks. A timely dose of informed optimism may help reassure all of us. The volume of cyberattacks, regulations, defense measures, and just plain noise has increased in the last decade, leading many business owners to wonder whether optimism has any place in conversations about digital operations and persistent cyberthreats. Yes, it does, for at least the following six reasons.

1. Security embedded in more technology Software increasingly is embedded everywhere in our daily business lives—introducing new, unpredictable, and interlinked vulnerabilities. But more software firms are rising to this need—recognizing that greater security also helps make them more competitive. We expect to see data encryption, multi-factor authentication, and other critical cybersecurity features built into the core of more software. These safeguards will become more affordable and within reach of small businesses. And when there's an incident, data recovery will be more seamless.

2. Greater collaboration between government and industry We're getting very good at sharing information and threat intelligence among business sectors, governments, and other peers. We now understand we have common enemies. This leads to streamlined public-private partnerships. Our government and industry partners are starting to align the patchwork of laws and regulations to flag cyberthreats and incidents more consistently—helping others to avoid becoming unwitting victims.

3. Free cybersecurity resources for small businesses Organizations such as the Cyber Readiness Institute (CRI) and government agencies like the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) offer free information, training, and tools specifically for small businesses. With just the investment of your time, you can take advantage of their training opportunities, including becoming cyber-certified. There are also technical resources, like scans and penetration tests, that can provide reassurance. Periodically, revisit what's offered as a proactive way to keep your business more cyber secure.

4. IT integrated into business operations We're learning to bring IT (information technology) into the heart of business operations. The financial impact of a significant cyber incident is a business risk, not a technology problem. We've learned cybersecurity is more effective and less expensive when we plan for it in the early stages of mergers and acquisitions, or when we onboard customers and receive their data or money. For business owners, cybersecurity isn't an afterthought but a core business concern.

5. Business resources focused on cybersecurity Businesses are getting better at pinpointing their top cybersecurity risks. They're using precise data to focus limited business resources where it can make the most difference—like any solid business analysis. As a small business owner, you can access these finer details to make decisions based on evidence, understand your unique risks more fully and factually, and be more efficient in mitigating risks.

6. A new generation of cyber talent on the rise A wave of new, trained, reinforcements is on the way with talented cyber workers flooding the zone. Employment of information security analysts is expected to grow by 30% from 2020 to 2030, outpacing the average for all occupations. Higher education has responded to the cybersecurity talent gap, and students are graduating from related programs and majors at a faster pace.

Of course, there's always room for ongoing improvement in digital operations. But we have plenty of reasons to start feeling more optimistic about progress made toward cybersecurity for small businesses.

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‘Healthy’ Pay Raises on Tap for 2024

Economic concerns are pushing some employers to think more conservatively about raises next year compared with this year.

But overall, employers are reaching their 2024 salary consensus, and it’s a good one for employees: They will be handing out competitive pay bumps, especially as their workforce continues to grapple with high costs of living.

U.S. employers are planning an overall average salary increase of 4 percent for 2024, according to the latest Salary Budget Planning Survey by consulting firm WTW, which surveyed more than 33,000 employers in December. Though down from the actual average increase of 4.4 percent in 2023, the numbers remain well above the 3.1 percent salary increase budget in 2021 and years prior.

Meanwhile, Mercer’s U.S. Compensation Planning Survey 2023 November edition, also released this month, finds a slightly more modest average salary hike of 3.8 percent in 2024 and an average merit boost of 3.5 percent.

“We are seeing healthy salary increases forecasted for 2024,” said Hatti Johannsson, research director of reward, data and intelligence at WTW. “Though economic uncertainty looms, employers are looking to remain competitive for talent, and pay is a key factor.”

The WTW and Mercer pay forecasts are the latest insights into pay moves for next year. Other surveys predicting salary trends for 2024 were conducted earlier in the year, but the new pair of surveys, conducted in recent weeks, help paint a clearer picture of pay raises for 2024.

What’s Driving 2024 Raises?

A couple of factors are contributing to employers’ pay raise strategies for 2024: high inflation and the still-tight job market.

Even though inflation has cooled from its red-hot pace, which hit a 40-year high of 9.1 percent last summer, workers continue to struggle with steep prices for food, housing, health care and other expenses. The effects of inflation have yet to wear off and may have intensified, with a recent Bank of America survey finding that months of high costs of living have pushed employee financial well-being to an all-time low. Credit card debt has also hit a record high, while most workers said inflation is an obstacle to saving for a comfortable retirement, according to a recent Charles Schwab survey. More than half of employers (55 percent) surveyed by WTW cited inflationary pressures as the primary reason behind increased salary budgets.

Nearly the same percentage of employers (52 percent) cited concerns over a tight labor market as a reason for bumping up workers’ pay, according to the WTW survey. Voluntary turnover and attrition are at 11 percent overall, WTW found. While attraction and retention are still common concerns, fewer organizations (48 percent) are reporting issues with finding and keeping workers, down from 60 percent in 2022.

“Competition for talent remains high, so [the 2024 forecasts are] indicative of how employers are feeling about the current labor market,” said Lauren Mason, senior principal in Mercer’s career practice.

Pay bumps aren’t the only strategy employers plan to adopt in order to attract and retain talent, the WTW survey found. Employers say they are embracing more workplace flexibility (63 percent); a broader emphasis on inclusion, equity and diversity (60 percent); and improving the employee experience (55 percent). Additionally, most employers say they have committed to hiring staff in a higher salary range (55 percent); undertaken compensation reviews of specific employee groups (54 percent); and raised starting salary ranges (49 percent).

Johannsson said organizations should think strategically about pay tactics for the upcoming year and remember that pay levels are difficult to reduce if markets deteriorate.

“It’s best to avoid basing decisions that will have long-term implications on their organization on temporary economic conditions,” she said.

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EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

5 Benefits That Will Rule 2024

If the last three years have proved anything to employers, it's that the pre-COVID work world is not coming back — at least, not without some vocal resistance from employees. How can companies move forward? By investing in well-being above all else, underlines Karan Singh, chief operating officer and chief people officer of Headspace. While debated return-to-office policies and rising healthcare premiums will make for a challenging new year, there are policies and benefits that can ease the burdens of both parties.

While no one workplace is the same, Singh predicts mental health benefits will continue to be at the heart of what will establish companies as great places to work in 2024. For Frank Giampietro, chief well-being officer for the Americas at EY, it's clear that even though hiring slowed this year, employees will continue to have more power in the labor market — and it would be a big mistake for employers to assume otherwise. From flexible, hybrid work policies to company-wide mandated vacation times, Singh and Giampietro agree that employees will only expect more from their benefits in 2024. These leaders shared the top five benefits that will rule in 2024:

Hybrid is the way to go According to ResumeBuilder, 90% of employers plan to ask their employees to return to the office in some capacity by 2024. But it's clear employees don't want to be in the office full-time: In a Flexjobs survey of over 8,000 workers, 63% voted remote work as the most important thing they look for in a job, beating out salary. Both Giampietro and Singh predict that more companies will invest in commuter, child and elder care benefits, as well as give employees a certain level of agency to choose when they come into the office. Ultimately, remote work is a table-stakes benefit to a majority of employees, but that doesn't mean being in-person doesn't have its value.

Preventive care saves lives and money
Chronic diseases continue to be the leading cause of disability and death in the U.S., with cancer still being the number one driver of healthcare costs. According to the Business Group on Health, nearly half of employers expect to see a higher rate of late-stage cancers in their workforce due to delayed screenings. And with healthcare costs increasing by 5.4% in 2024, it seems employers will need to rethink if their health plans are keeping employees as healthy as possible. This may mean eliminating any financial barriers to primary care, as well as ensuring immunizations, cancer screenings, blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol tests are free and encouraged. For some employers, they may go as far as to remove deductibles and copays altogether, in hopes of reducing long-term healthcare spend with a healthier workforce.

Mental health is about the mind and body
COVID prompted many employers to provide mental health care offerings, with 23% of workers reporting that their employer introduced new mental health benefits during the pandemic. While it's been nearly four years since the initial COVID outbreak in the U.S., mental health benefits are on course for growth, emphasizes Singh. He predicts employers will start expanding their definition of mental health care, adding lifestyle benefits that help employees create healthier routines for their minds and bodies.

Mandated vacation time for the whole company
While companies are still debating the benefits of unlimited versus accrued PTO policies, employers on either side of the debate can usually agree: Taking vacation time is stressful when the rest of the company is still working. Giampietro highlights that EY now has a week-long winter and summer break for the entire firm, ensuring that everyone can truly unplug for a few weeks a year.

Lifestyle and wellness stipends that leave no one out Most workforces will have employees with a wide range of needs, making it feel impossible for HR leaders to include everyone in every benefit. However, well-being reimbursements and stipends can account for a lot of financial concerns, from child and pet care, to mattresses and gaming chairs — something Giampietro has seen firsthand at EY, which offers employees up to $1,800 to invest in their physical, mental and financial wellness. Giampietro notes that EY is considering revamping their current offering into a more substantial lifestyle fund, making the benefit even more flexible and easier to access. Whatever shape the benefits take, it's clear that mental health and wellness are the backbone of what employers and employees will need in 2024. Singh reminds employers that their company's success depends on the health and engagement of their workforce. Wellness benefits are not just a matter of corporate kindness, but are a long-term business strategy.

benefitnews.com

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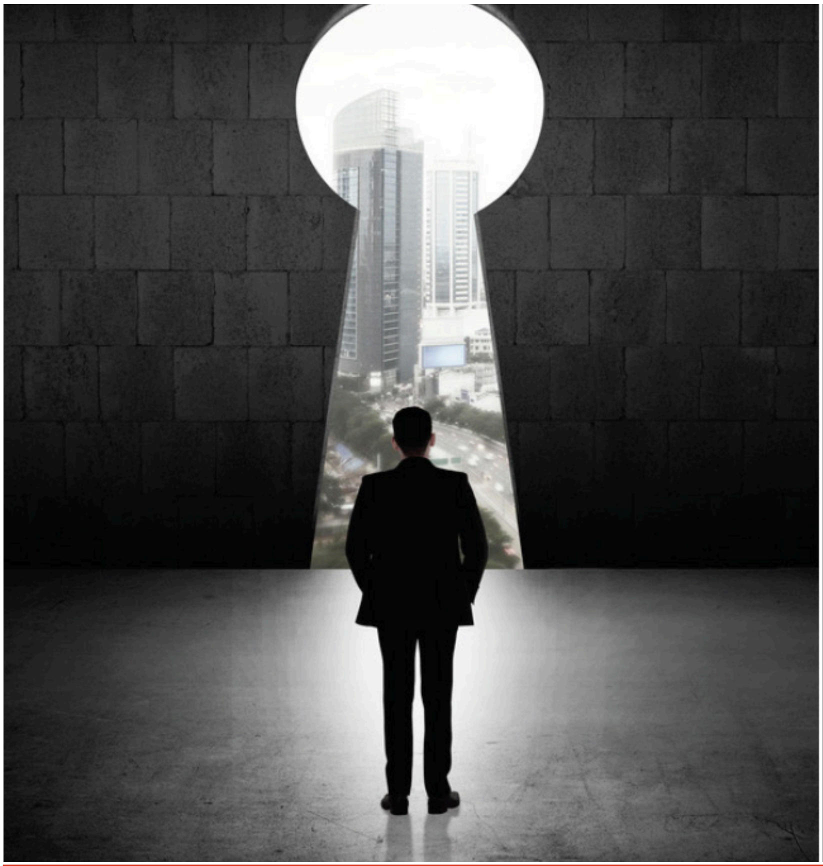

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Want to learn more about what Key HR can do for your business?

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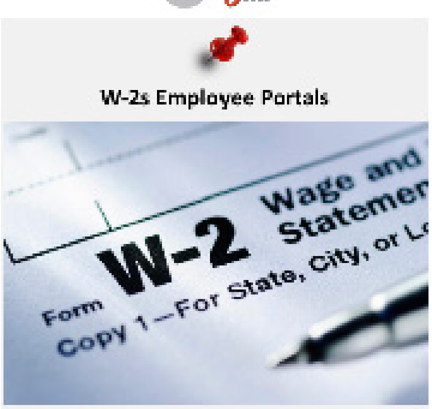

W-2s will be mailed out, on or before January 31, 2024. Your W-2 will be available in your employee portal starting at 12 noon January 19, 2024.

To retrieve your W2 Online - Please sign on to:

https://key-ep.prismhr.com/#/auth/login

If you are not already registered to the employee portal, you will need register first. To Register you will need to enter your Last Name, Social Security number and Email Address that matches your employee record. See example below.

If you already have an account you can enter your Username and Password and click **Log In**.

If you have problems, Please reach out to the Hotline for assistance : (844) 482-7377

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