NCSHA

Ask Nolyn – Promoting Cybersecurity Among Staff

Kentucky Housing Corporation

Management Innovation: Technology

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Every email Nolyn Johnson Jr. sends reads, "Thank You and remember, 'Be Secure!'" It has become a mantra for the Cyber Security team at Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC). With every email, in every communication with the public, guard yourself against an attack.

The motto has become increasingly necessary in recent years. As more governmental agencies and financial institutions face cyber threats, Kentucky Housing Corporation has worked to strengthen its network security to protect its staff, customers, partners and general public and their information from theft or damage.

It began with creating the Cyber Security team in 2019. Quickly, they launched an informational campaign, branding themselves with a logo, encouraging employees through emails and flyers in common spaces that "If you see something, say something." They conducted biannual trainings that netted 100 percent participation.

But last year, the team ramped up its approach. It created two training videos to educate staff about how they could spot suspicious emails. Then, they installed a Phish Alert button on everyone's Outlook ribbon (*pictured at right)* to help them easily report suspicious emails to our Cyber Security Team.

Phish Alert Report

Lastly, they launched an engagement campaign to help answer people's questions and protect them during particularly sensitive times like the holidays. As tensions escalated between Russia and Ukraine, the Cyber Security team also sent emails to staff and partners with tips for how to protect themselves against potential hackers.

Innovation
Particularly innovative was the *Ask Nolyn* segment. Nolyn works in Memphis, Tennessee, but he is one of the most well-known staff members at KHC because of his *TikTok … Think Not!* training video. In it, he makes cybersecurity fun. Throughout the presentation, he acts as if he is stressed and needs to jump on TikTok to watch videos, dance and relax. That video endeared Nolyn to the staff and built trust.

Then, Nolyn began soliciting questions through *Ask Nolyn*. Each week, in KHC's internal newsletter, he asked people what they needed to know, highlighted KHC security features and programs and answered questions the following week in quick, entertaining videos. He taught people how to spot phishing, educated them about smishing and warned them not to open voicemails from unknown numbers or they could be the victims of vishing.

Nolyn took what could be a complicated, scary or dry subject and made it engaging, and he received a good response from the staff. People were already familiar with him and felt connected to him, so Nolyn became a confidant who could alleviate their security concerns and talk to them at their level. His down-to-earth approach made staff see the value in email encryption, avoiding certain apps and being cautious with their information.

As a result, KHC staff are more cautious at a time when nearly 85 percent of them are remote, more vulnerable to attack and potentially laxer with security protocols. Nolyn's segment keeps cyber security in the forefront of their minds.

Addressing A Challenge
Ask Nolyn achieves an important corporate objective – to protect the information of everyone who entrusts it to KHC. As a state housing finance agency, KHC has access to a lot of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) from Section 8 tenants, our mortgage and down payment assistance loan holders, applicants for federal programs and employee information that it wants to protect.

KHC staff are a frontline defense to hackers seeking PII. Having a strong network and informed staff makes KHC less vulnerable to invasion and better protects customers' information. Educating staff to better protect KHC networks from attackers also saves KHC money. If KHC's financial information were to be exposed, it could be subject to fines from federal agencies that back its loans like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Replicable
Ask Nolyn was easy and inexpensive to implement. With a largely remote staff, KHC relies heavily on Microsoft Teams and 8x8 now to host virtual meetings with internal and external audiences. Both are subscriptions KHC already had, and both systems offer a record feature, where people can set up a meeting with themselves or another staff member and record their conversation.

When filming *Ask Nolyn* responses, Nolyn recorded himself on Microsoft Teams and then sent the video to Communications and Marketing Services to upload to YouTube and link in the biweekly internal newsletter. Communications created the introductory song and graphic using Vyond animation software ($89 monthly subscription) and a free voice recording app to brand the campaign.

The effort used existing resources and systems and was a free way to spread the message about cybersecurity, and the videos are archived on an *Ask Nolyn* page on KHC's intranet so that staff can refer to the messages.

Measurable Results
As a result of the Cyber Security team's combined efforts, KHC's Technology Services department regularly receives Phish Alerts for suspicious emails that could threaten the corporation. The number of phishing attempts is decreasing as hackers learn they cannot permeate the network. KHC's protection rate is nearly 100 percent because of education efforts, and users' understanding of what constitutes phishing has helped them more quickly identify any phishing attempts that may have slipped through and alert Technology Services, so they can correct the problem before a hacker gains access to the network.

Also, KHC's leadership has begun to buy in, asking for special alerts and segments covering topics like home security while we are working remotely and how to identify scams during the holidays.

One notable way that KHC could see the impact of the cybersecurity awareness training was this past winter when the Employee Services department sent staff on the corporation's health plan a survey about the open enrollment process. The email was sent through SurveyMonkey with a return address of facebook@kyhousing.org, a legitimate KHC email address. Nearly all the 111 recipients flagged the email as spam, causing the Cyber Security, Employee Services and Communication team to revise the way they send emails to staff to ensure they are received and opened.

Supplemental Materials
Cyber Security's efforts have a wide-sweeping impact on every aspect of the corporation. Their efforts have strengthened KHC's network and protected the information of our borrowers, partners and public, making everyone's jobs easier.

To see how *Ask Nolyn* has affected KHC, watch this video.