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## **STANISLAWSKI & COMPANY, INC.**

*A Certified Public Accounting and Business Consulting Firm*

September ~ October 2011

### **RE: DON'T TELL & DO ASK (Securing Your Personal Information)**

Dear Friends of Stanislawski & Company, Inc.:

We hope you had a relaxing summer! In this newsletter, we want to address securing your personal information – something you can never be too careful about. We all hear the stories on the news about how the scammers are getting smarter and smarter so we figured a good personal security policy is to “don’t tell and do ask.” In this regard, we highly recommend that you do not give out any information over the phone unless you personally know the person or you initiated the call. Also, we recommend that you do not respond to emails that are supposedly from your financial institutions (banks, brokers and even your payroll service company), or from government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or the Franchise Tax Board. The IRS never emails taxpayers and in most cases would not even have your email address. A client asked us about a tax Form W-9 that they received in the mail supposedly from their bank which seemed unusual (and the bank’s letterhead looked odd too). We recommended that they contact the bank. If you get an email or form that you are concerned about, simply call the financial institution at their regular phone number (not the one on the email or on the suspicious document). If you get a phone call from your credit card company asking you to verifying any information – tell them you will call them back and call your credit card company using the phone number on the back of your credit card (not the one the caller gave you).

Then there’s social engineering . . . scams to compromise your company’s computer systems. The scam starts with the social engineer developing a profile of the company, the firm’s employees, the systems or software the firm uses, and then they determine the best way to hack the firm’s computer systems. Sometimes these scams involve fairly innocuous questions, and/or free gifts such as flash drives or an iPhone or another electronic device given to the executive. These free gifts can be loaded with malware (malicious software) which is designed to compromise your computer systems. Another social engineering scam is that a supposed vendor calls, asks you or an employee a few innocuous questions, and then asks for an email address to send a proposal. The scammer then sends the proposal in a .pdf format which is actually a maliciously encoded file with the capability of making a remote connection to the recipient’s computer! Again, we recommend that you don’t release any information to people you don’t know and that you educate/restrict your employees regarding the same. You can protect your firm by: 1) training your employees about computer security, 2) keeping your security software updated, and 3) periodically performing a security audit. If you need assistance with these measures, contact your IT professional (or we can always give you a referral too).

We also recommend a few other general precautions. First, your account passwords should be 8 digits in length, a mix of letters and numbers, and should be changed every few months. Secondly, don’t use the same password for all of your accounts. Lastly, don’t send flash/pen drives through the mail – there’s a good chance they will get stolen (if not for the information it contains then for the value of the flash drive). One of our client’s decided to mail us a flash drive (which we would have advised against), and the envelope arrived at our office unsealed without the flash drive. The drive contained all of the client’s company QuickBooks files and bank account information (for the company and for his personal accounts) so he had to close about 10 bank accounts and credit cards. The client said he couldn’t believe he took such a risk and asked that we share his experience. If you have concerns on how to transfer your QuickBooks files or other financial information to us, please contact us – we have several ways to securely transfer your information.

In closing, thank you for your referrals, and your continued trust and confidence. Business is great at Stanislawski & Company, Inc. and we are looking for more.

Sincerely,

Charles G. Stanislawski, M.B.T., C.P.A

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