

UOB-SMU Entrepreneurship Alliance Centre

Data Terminator: Destroy, Protect, Secured!



DATATERMINATOR
Security with Confidence

Data Terminator Pte Ltd is an information leakage protection specialist providing certified equipment and professional services for secure electronic data erasure, destruction and disposal.

Founded in 2007, the company has secured a clientele spanning government agencies and statutory boards, financial services industry players and multinational companies.

The company's comprehensive range of secure data destruction equipment meets the standards of the US Department of Defense and is also certified by the National Security Agency, an independent agency within the US Department of Defense. Its services comply with the required standards and its processes are ISO9001:2008 certified. These international and quality standards and certifications give assurance to the SME's customers that their data assets are properly sanitised and disposed off. Data Terminator also provides protection for computer end points to prevent information leakage; forensics solutions for fraud and malicious activities detection on corporate networks, and remote access monitoring system to prevent abuse by privileged users on corporate servers and networks.

Reuse, reduce and recycle... not applicable

"I re-format my hard drive." "We use reputable disk-wiping software." "We engage the services of a disposal company to get rid of our IT equipment and the data within." If your personal data resides with a financial institution that uses such data sanitisation processes, be prepared for information leakage – because none of these methods can guarantee successful deletion. Like the oft-quoted line "I'll be back" from the 1984 movie "The Terminator", the data you thought had been erased could well "come back", recovered by the right software.

Ineffective though the deletion methods may be, many organisations in Singapore do not appear to have proper or effective procedures to permanently and totally remove the information in their data storage devices when they retire their equipment. As electronic devices like personal computers and laptops tend to be renewed every two to four years, an alarming quantity of sensitive information could be accessed by mischief-makers or data thieves – with dire consequences.

Companies in the financial services industry are more susceptible to data leakage than companies in other industries because of the type of data they keep. Indeed, a global data breach report from Verizon and the US Secret Service revealed that 94 per cent of all records compromised in 2009 came from the financial services industry.

Singapore does not have a corresponding report, but findings from this SME Consulting Programme project revealed a disturbing lack of data security knowledge among the staff working in the financial institutions. In an industry where customer data confidentiality reigns supreme, any security breach or data leakage will cause irreparable damage to the financial institution's reputation and industry standing, as well as result in financial losses for its customers.

Shockingly, the survey findings revealed a low awareness of the more effective secure data disposal methods such as degaussing and physical destruction. Degaussing, a data sanitisation service which Data Terminator offers, is a process where the magnetic flux stored in a magnetised medium is reduced to near zero. This method often renders the hard drives inoperable, and at the end state, the data cannot be recovered using any known technology in existence today.

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Singapore is a global business and financial hub, but on a national level, it does not have any specific data breach notification legislation that makes it mandatory for companies to report a privacy breach or leakage of personal customer information. Instead, data protection and privacy is regulated via industry-specific laws, and enforced by industry regulatory bodies.

Against this industry backdrop, Data Terminator wanted insights into the attitude and buying behaviour of its customers with a view to refining its marketing strategies and promote company growth.

Destroy and protect

Over a period of 12 weeks, three student-consultants under the SME Consulting Programme tapped on their knowledge of research methodology to design and carry out a market research for Data Terminator. The SME Consulting Programme is managed by the UOB-SMU Entrepreneurship Alliance.

Based on their findings, they presented a report comprising the research data and analysis. The report also included their recommendations on how the SME can best exploit its strengths to benefit from the opportunities arising, as well as mitigate any weaknesses or potential threats.

“The SME Consulting Programme delivered to our expectations. What we did not expect was the team’s ability to ‘peel the onion’ on some of the data to draw insightful assessment of customer behaviour,” says Mr David Ong, director of Data Terminator. He commended the team members on their “alertness” as “they presented a certain level of deduction and conclusion based on their interactions with the customers; this was something that only an alert researcher would pick up,” he explains.

As the survey results corroborated some of the company’s own findings about the buying behaviour of its customers, “it allows us to confidently focus our resources on the segment where customer behaviour and needs are better aligned with our strengths,” he adds. The company would use the information to re-think its marketing approach and cost model to capture its target market segment.

What price security?

When they had to collect highly confidential and sensitive data from their respondents, the consultants, understandably, met with real “firewalls” of resistance ranging from uneasiness to a total refusal to participate in the surveys. Through persistence and innovative use of the online platform to reach out to the respondents, the team broke through the wall of unwillingness. They elicited and collated the responses of bank executives, financial industry professionals and academia.

The consultants’ enthusiasm and initiative was “commendable”, though Mr Ong felt that their output was limited by the lack of experience in real, hands-on industry research. Prior experience in a commercial research house, for example, would enable them to better adapt and apply what they have learnt to a real-life situation. The input of the project advisor is critical, but ultimately, he “can only guide so much”. Still, he was happy that he could use the findings to enhance his business operations.

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