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TROY, Mich., April 23 /PRNewswire/ -- With nearly 70 percent of businesses losing or having sensitive data stolen six times a year, the issue of information security is becoming increasingly important.* In response, Automation Alley's Southeast Michigan Information Security Regional Skills Alliance (RSA), in conjunction with Intellitrends, LLC, conducted a survey of Southeast Michigan businesses, which found better education and certification programs must be developed to help companies strengthen their information security practices and ensure sensitive information is secure.

"With the rapid evolution of technology, it is critically important that businesses take a serious look at their attitude towards information security, their processes and their personnel," said Karen Thompson Nickerson, manager, Information Security RSA, Automation Alley. "The results of this survey provide a foundation and comparative benchmark for the RSA to identify and address local concerns, especially those related to workforce, with our information security partners moving forward."

Exemplifying the importance of information security (sometimes referred to as information assurance) is a recent announcement by a major discount retailer that hackers accessed data from at least 45.7 million customer credit and debit cards. Dubbed the "largest card heist ever," the full extent of the crime may never be known. That such a large breach could go unnoticed for 18 months points to potential security holes at many other firms and underlines the important role information security plays within an organization.

In addition to the external threat from hackers, the issue of information security is compounded by the threat of internal security breaches. The Southeast Michigan design and engineering process consulting company, DASI Solutions, recently settled a case in which an employee stole sensitive information through access to the company's internal network.

"As an active member of the Automation Alley RSA, I want to educate my peers about the importance of information security as well as the policies and procedures that can help protect and minimize the threats they face on a daily basis," said David Darbyshire, engineer/owner, DASI Solutions. "One area that is often overlooked, especially by small businesses, is protection against internal threats. By advocating for and helping develop a strong information security workforce, the Automation Alley RSA is working to ensure businesses like mine will

have access to talented, ethical information security professionals."

The RSA survey represents the opinions of 261 Southeast Michigan businesses, discussing their approaches to information security and the educational requirements needed for employment in the field. This issue is particularly important to Southeast Michigan as it encompasses a large manufacturing base, a number of high-tech and pharmaceutical businesses, one of the nation's largest defense procurement agencies, and busy international border crossings. Automation Alley's RSA developed the survey and Intellitrends, LLC, a leading international marketing research firm located in Clarkston, Mich., conducted, compiled and analyzed the survey results.

According to the survey, Southeast Michigan businesses recognize the importance of information security with a majority responding that it is a "high priority" and one-third anticipating a strong increase in focus. The survey responses indicate companies are changing from a reactive to proactive response to information security. Two-thirds of respondents indicate the focus on information security-related training will increase over the next 12 months, led at this point by information sensitive industries such as finance, information and professional business services. Companies with global operations are being driven not only by required adherence to government requirements, but also by a strategic need to protect competitive assets.

"The results of this survey make it clear that aggressive initiatives are needed to address the rising threat level faced by businesses," said Keith Stone, executive vice president, Intellitrends. "A skilled information security workforce is a must for any company doing business in today's interconnected environment. By partnering with educational and training institutions in Southeast Michigan, Automation Alley's RSA is working to develop a strategy for maintaining a well-trained information security workforce in our region."

Citing a lack of certification, training and information security standards as major areas for improvement, the RSA survey found that more than 90 percent of the staff at companies with global operations hold an information security degree or certification, while less than 25 percent of businesses with local or national presence hold formal training or certifications. A number of Southeast Michigan universities are working to address the fragmentation of education requirements in the field. Three of the nation's 75 National Centers for Academic Excellence in Information Assurance Education are located in the region - Eastern Michigan University, the University of Detroit-Mercy and Walsh College. These institutions are part of a movement that helped create curricular requirements for information security aimed at developing a well-educated information security workforce.

The Information Security RSA is a partnership between businesses, government, educational institutions, training providers, economic development organizations and public workforce system agencies. Partners collaborate to assess and solve workforce problems in innovative ways. In December 2005, the State of Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth acknowledged Automation Alley as an Information Security RSA recipient. The RSA is partnering with prominent members of the information security industry to ensure the information security industry has a trained and skilled workforce in Southeast Michigan.

A full copy of the survey findings is available on the Automation Alley Information Security RSA web site, <http://www.automationalley.com/MIRSA>. For more information on Automation Alley's Information Security RSA, contact the Automation Alley Resource Center at (800) 427-5100.

About Automation Alley

Automation Alley drives the growth and image of Southeast Michigan's technology economy through a collaborative culture that focuses on workforce and business development initiatives.

Since its founding in 1999, Automation Alley has expanded to include more than 700 businesses, educational institutions and government entities, covering an eight county area and the City of Detroit. Automation Alley promotes regional prosperity through the Automation Alley International Business Center, which provides business attraction services and exporting assistance; the Automation Alley Technology Center, which brings together businesses, educators and government to help entrepreneurs accelerate technology commercialization; and the GLIMA Network, a state-wide association for individuals engaged with and involved in technology-oriented industries.


For more information, visit <http://www.automationalley.com/>.

*SOURCE: IT Policy Compliance Group

Automation Alley

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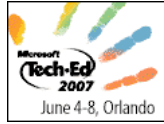
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