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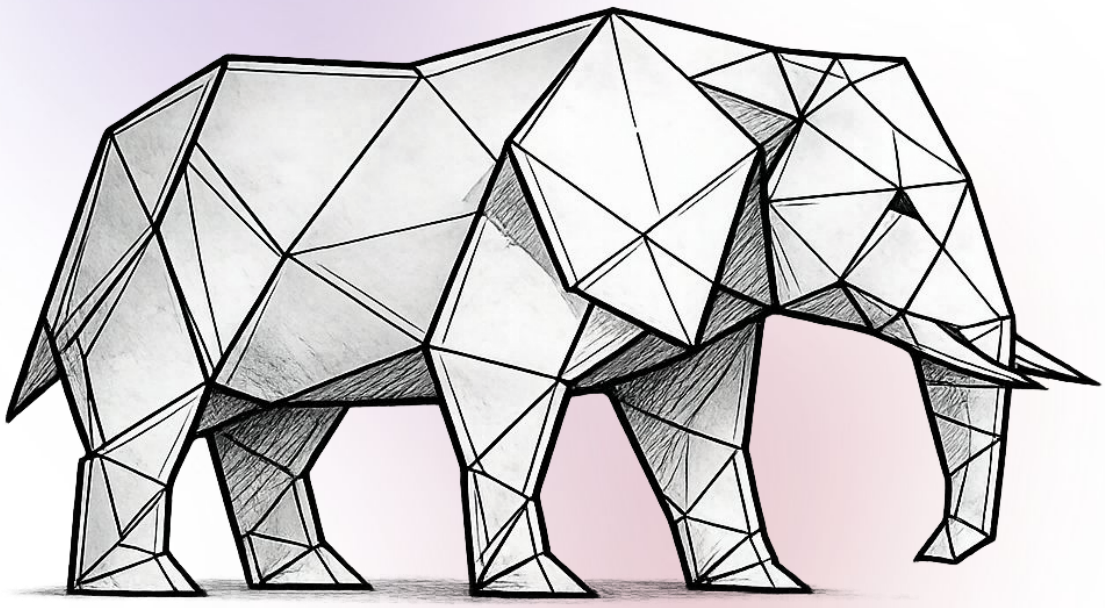

The Essential Security Questionnaire Questions

The questions you'll see, before you see them

About the Author

Neil Cameron has spent two decades building software products, previously as co-founder and CTO of Progression, a venture-backed HR tech startup which was acquired at the end of 2024. Prior to that, he was founding CTO at EmpowerRD, a market leading R&D tax credit claim product. It was at Progression where he first experienced the pain of security questionnaires while selling to mid-market and enterprise customers. After dealing with dozens of them, often while juggling hiring, product work and helping close deals, he became convinced there had to be a better way.

About ResponseHub

ResponseHub helps teams respond to security questionnaires quickly and accurately without needing a dedicated compliance function.

ResponseHub is designed for speed and self-serve use. Upload a questionnaire and get AI-generated answers grounded in your policies and knowledge base, with confidence ratings and clear citations. Built-in explainers help you understand what reviewers are actually looking for, and a knowledge base with semantic search means you never start from zero.

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Question

Where is your service hosted? (Own data center, public cloud, or on-premise deployment)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking about the physical or virtual location where your service is running. Essentially, it wants to know whether your service is hosted in your own data center, in a public cloud environment provided by a third-party (like AWS, Azure, or Google Cloud), or on-premise within your own facilities. Understanding where your service is hosted is crucial for assessing the security posture, compliance requirements, and potential vulnerabilities associated with that environment.

Why It Matters:

Knowing where your service is hosted helps in evaluating the security measures in place. For instance, hosting in a public cloud means you benefit from the robust security features provided by the cloud provider, but you also need to ensure proper configuration and access controls. If your service is hosted in your own data center, you have full control over the physical and network security but must ensure you have the necessary expertise and resources to maintain it. On-premise deployments require careful consideration of both physical and cyber security measures to protect the service from threats.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate where your service is hosted, you might provide documentation such as a hosting agreement with a cloud provider, a diagram of your data center infrastructure, or details of your on-premise setup including security protocols and maintenance schedules. For a public cloud, evidence could include screenshots of your cloud console showing the service deployment, along with any security configurations applied.

Example 1

Our service is hosted on Heroku, utilizing their Platform as a Service (PaaS) offering. We rely on Heroku's built-in security features, including automated SSL certificate management, regular security updates, and isolation of applications within their secure infrastructure.

Example 2

Our service is hosted on Amazon Web Services (AWS), leveraging a combination of EC2 instances, RDS for databases, and S3 for storage. We have implemented advanced security measures including VPCs, security groups, IAM roles for access control, and continuous monitoring with AWS GuardDuty.

Example 3

Our software is deployed on-premise within our own data center. We maintain full control over the physical and network security, employing a multi-layered security approach including firewalls, intrusion detection systems, regular security audits, and a dedicated security team to manage and monitor the environment.

Question

Which cloud provider(s) do you use? (AWS, Azure, GCP, etc.)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking you to identify which cloud service providers your organization uses to host its applications, store data, or run other services. Common cloud providers include Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure, and Google Cloud Platform (GCP). Knowing which cloud providers you use is crucial because each provider has its own set of security features, compliance certifications, and potential vulnerabilities.

Why It Matters:

Understanding which cloud providers your organization uses helps in assessing the overall security posture. Different cloud providers offer various security tools and practices, and they may also have different compliance requirements. For example, if your organization uses AWS, you might leverage AWS Identity and Access Management (IAM) for controlling access to resources. If you use Azure, you might use Azure Active Directory for similar purposes. Identifying the cloud providers allows security teams to tailor their strategies and ensure that appropriate security measures are in place across all environments.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a document or a list that outlines the cloud providers your organization uses. This could include details such as the services utilized (e.g., compute, storage, databases) and any specific security configurations or compliance frameworks adhered to within those environments. For instance, you might present an inventory report that lists AWS accounts, Azure subscriptions, and GCP projects along with their associated security groups and access controls.

Example 1

Our organization exclusively uses Heroku as our cloud provider to host our SaaS application. We leverage Heroku's managed platform to handle infrastructure, allowing us to focus on application development and security within the constraints and features provided by Heroku.

Example 2

Our organization utilizes Amazon Web Services (AWS) as our primary cloud provider. We have a multi-account strategy with dedicated accounts for development, testing, and production environments. We use a variety of AWS services including EC2, S3, RDS, and Lambda, and we implement AWS Identity and Access Management (IAM) for access control.

Example 3

Our organization primarily operates on-premises software solutions and does not utilize cloud providers like AWS, Azure, or GCP for hosting our applications or storing data. Therefore, the question regarding cloud providers is not applicable to our current infrastructure.

Question

In which geographic regions/countries is customer data stored and processed?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking you to identify the specific geographic locations or countries where your organization stores and processes customer data. This includes understanding where the data resides (storage) and where it is actively used or manipulated (processing).

Why It Matters:

Knowing where customer data is stored and processed is crucial for several reasons. Different countries have varying data protection laws and regulations, such as the GDPR in Europe or the CCPA in California. Compliance with these laws often depends on the location of the data. Additionally, storing data in certain regions can impact performance, latency, and the security posture due to differing infrastructure and threat landscapes. Understanding these locations helps in assessing risks, ensuring compliance, and making informed decisions about data management practices.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a detailed map or a list of data centers along with the types of customer data they handle. For instance, you could show that customer data is stored in data centers located in the United States, Germany, and Japan, and processed in cloud environments hosted by providers in those regions. Additionally, you might include documentation or configurations that specify where data is routed for processing based on user location or service requirements.

Example 1

Customer data is stored and processed exclusively within the United States, utilizing a PaaS provider's data centers located in the AWS US-East-1 region. This ensures compliance with local data protection regulations and optimizes performance for our primary user base.

Example 2

Customer data is stored and processed across multiple geographic regions including the United States, Germany, and Singapore. This is achieved through our AWS infrastructure, where data is routed to the nearest region based on the user's location to enhance performance and comply with regional data sovereignty laws.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and customer data never leaves the client's local network, the question of geographic storage and processing of data does not apply to our setup. All data handling is conducted within the client's own infrastructure, ensuring full control and compliance with their specific data protection requirements.

Question

Is your production network segmented into different security zones? Please describe your network architecture.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether the organization has divided its production network into distinct security zones. Each zone should have its own set of security controls and policies. The goal of network segmentation is to limit the spread of threats and contain potential breaches. By segmenting the network, an organization can ensure that sensitive data and critical systems are isolated from less secure areas.

Why It Matters:

Segmenting the network into security zones helps protect the organization's assets by creating barriers that prevent unauthorized access and limit the impact of a security incident. For example, if a breach occurs in one zone, it is less likely to spread to other parts of the network. This approach enhances the overall security posture and helps meet compliance requirements.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, an organization might provide a network diagram that shows how the production network is divided into different security zones. The diagram should highlight the boundaries between zones, the types of data and systems within each zone, and the security controls in place. Additionally, documentation of the policies and procedures governing access between zones would serve as strong evidence of proper network segmentation.

Example 1

Our production network, hosted on Heroku, is segmented into two main security zones: the application zone and the database zone. The application zone contains our web application and API services, while the database zone houses our PostgreSQL database. Access between these zones is restricted and monitored.

Example 2

Our production network on AWS is segmented into multiple security zones, including public, private, and restricted zones. The public zone hosts our web servers and content delivery services, the private zone contains our application servers and microservices, and the restricted zone houses our sensitive data and critical systems. Each zone is isolated using VPCs, security groups, and network ACLs, with strict access controls and monitoring in place.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and not in a cloud environment, the concept of network segmentation into security zones as described does not directly apply. However, we have implemented physical and logical separation of our network segments based on function and sensitivity, with appropriate access controls and monitoring.

Question

What cryptographic standards do you use to protect data in transit? (e.g., TLS 1.2+)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking about the specific cryptographic protocols your organization uses to secure data while it is being transferred between different systems or over the internet. "Data in transit" refers to data that is moving from one place to another, such as when you send an email, browse a website, or transfer files between servers. The goal is to ensure that this data cannot be easily intercepted or read by unauthorized parties.

Why It Matters:

Using strong cryptographic standards like TLS (Transport Layer Security) 1.2 or higher is crucial because it helps protect the confidentiality and integrity of data. When data is encrypted using these standards, it is scrambled in a way that only the intended recipient can unscramble it. This prevents attackers from eavesdropping on communications or tampering with the data. For example, when you visit a website using HTTPS, your connection to that site is secured using TLS, ensuring that your data (like passwords or personal information) is protected from prying eyes.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation showing that your web servers are configured to use TLS 1.2 or higher for all HTTPS connections. This could include server configuration files, network diagrams, or results from security scans that confirm the use of these cryptographic standards. Additionally, you might show logs or reports from your monitoring tools that indicate all data transfers comply with the required cryptographic protocols.

Example 1

We utilize TLS 1.2+ to secure all data in transit. This is enforced through Heroku's platform settings and confirmed via regular security audits and penetration testing reports.

Example 2

We employ TLS 1.2+ for all data in transit. This is achieved through AWS Certificate Manager for SSL/TLS certificates and is consistently verified through our automated security compliance checks and third-party security assessments.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and does not involve data transfer over public networks, the use of TLS 1.2+ for data in transit is not applicable. However, we ensure secure data handling within our internal network using industry-standard encryption protocols.

Question

What cryptographic standards do you use to protect data at rest? (e.g., AES-256)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking about the specific cryptographic standards your organization uses to secure data that is stored, or "at rest." Cryptographic standards are established methods for encrypting data to make it unreadable to unauthorized users. When data is at rest, it is stored on physical media such as hard drives, SSDs, or backup tapes. Protecting this data is crucial because if an attacker gains access to the storage media, they would need to decrypt the data to read it. Using strong cryptographic standards ensures that even if the data is accessed, it remains secure and unreadable without the proper decryption keys.

Why It Matters and Example Evidence:

Understanding and disclosing the cryptographic standards you use is important because it demonstrates your commitment to data security. It also helps stakeholders assess whether your encryption methods meet industry standards and regulatory requirements. For example, using AES-256 (Advanced Encryption Standard with a 256-bit key) is a strong choice because it is widely recognized for its security and is used by governments and organizations worldwide.

To provide evidence of your cryptographic standards, you might reference your data protection policies, configuration settings from your encryption tools, or audit reports that detail the encryption methods in use. For instance, you could show a configuration file from your encryption software that specifies AES-256 as the encryption algorithm for data at rest, or an excerpt from an audit report confirming the use of this standard.

Example 1

We utilize AES-256 encryption for all data at rest within our Heroku-hosted environment. This standard is applied across all databases and storage solutions to ensure the highest level of security for our customer data.

Example 2

Our AWS-hosted infrastructure employs a combination of AES-256 and RSA-4096 encryption standards for data at rest. These cryptographic methods are implemented across our S3 buckets, EBS volumes, and RDS instances to safeguard sensitive information.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively deployed on-premises and does not involve cloud storage, the question regarding cryptographic standards for data at rest is not directly applicable. However, we ensure that all data stored on our local servers is protected using FIPS 140-2 validated encryption algorithms.

Question

How do you manage cryptographic keys? Describe your key management system and practices.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking about the processes and systems your organization uses to handle cryptographic keys. Cryptographic keys are essential components used in encryption and decryption processes to secure data. Proper management of these keys is critical because if they are compromised, it can lead to unauthorized access to sensitive information. The question wants to understand the specific methods and tools you use to generate, store, distribute, rotate, and revoke cryptographic keys.

Security Context and Practical Example

Effective key management involves several practices to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of cryptographic keys. For example, keys should be generated using secure algorithms and stored in a Hardware Security Module (HSM) or a Key Management Service (KMS) provided by cloud providers. Access to these keys should be strictly controlled, with only authorized personnel able to perform key-related operations.

Example of Evidence:

An example of evidence to demonstrate fulfillment of this question could be documentation of your key management policy, which outlines the procedures for key generation, storage, access control, rotation, and revocation. This could include logs of key usage, audit trails showing who accessed the keys and when, and reports from security audits or penetration tests that verify the effectiveness of your key management practices. Additionally, providing details about the tools and technologies used, such as HSMs or KMS, and any training programs for staff on key management protocols, would further substantiate your response.

Example 1

We utilize Heroku's built-in encryption features to manage cryptographic keys, ensuring they are securely generated and stored. Access to these keys is restricted to a limited number of authorized team members, and we implement regular key rotation practices to enhance security.

Example 2

Our key management system is integrated with AWS Key Management Service (KMS), allowing us to centrally manage cryptographic keys across our infrastructure. We follow a strict policy for key generation, storage, and access, with automated key rotation and detailed audit logs to track key usage and access.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and does not rely on cloud-based encryption services, we manage cryptographic keys through a dedicated on-site key management system. This system ensures secure key generation, storage, and access control, although it does not utilize cloud-based key management services.

Question

Describe your secrets management strategy for API credentials, tokens, passwords, and certificates.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking you to detail how your organization handles sensitive information such as API credentials, tokens, passwords, and certificates. These items are collectively known as "secrets," and they are critical for authenticating and authorizing access to various systems and services. Proper secrets management ensures that these sensitive pieces of information are stored, accessed, and rotated securely to prevent unauthorized access and potential breaches.

Why It Matters and Practical Example:

Effective secrets management is vital because if secrets are mishandled, they can be easily exploited by attackers to gain unauthorized access to your systems. For example, if API credentials are hard-coded into application source code and then pushed to a public repository, anyone with access to that repository can use those credentials to access your API, potentially leading to data breaches or service disruptions.

To demonstrate a robust secrets management strategy, you might describe using a secrets management service like HashiCorp Vault or AWS Secrets Manager. These services provide secure storage, automatic rotation, and fine-grained access controls for secrets. As evidence, you could show logs or audit trails that indicate regular rotation of secrets and restricted access policies in place, ensuring only authorized personnel or services can retrieve secrets when needed.

Example 1

We utilize Heroku's built-in secrets management to securely store and manage API credentials, tokens, passwords, and certificates. Access to these secrets is restricted to essential team members through Heroku's role-based access control, and secrets are rotated quarterly to enhance security.

Example 2

Our secrets management strategy involves using AWS Secrets Manager for storing and retrieving sensitive information. We implement automatic rotation of secrets and utilize AWS IAM roles and policies to ensure that only authorized services and personnel can access these secrets. Additionally, we maintain an audit log for all access to secrets to monitor for any unauthorized activity.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and does not interact with external APIs or cloud services, the traditional secrets management strategy is not applicable. However, we ensure that all sensitive information is encrypted at rest using industry-standard encryption algorithms and access is controlled through a robust internal permissions system.

Question

Are all security events logged in production? (authentication events, privilege escalations, access to sensitive data)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization systematically records all significant security-related activities that occur in your production environment. Specifically, it wants to know if you log events such as users attempting to log in (authentication events), users gaining higher levels of access (privilege escalations), and users accessing sensitive or critical data.

Why It Matters:

Logging these events is crucial for several reasons. First, it allows you to detect and respond to security incidents promptly. If an unauthorized user attempts to log in or access sensitive data, having a log of these events enables you to identify the attempt and take appropriate action. Second, logs provide an audit trail that can be used to investigate security breaches, comply with regulatory requirements, and understand user behavior within your systems.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that you are logging these security events, you might provide documentation or configuration settings that show how your systems are set up to capture authentication attempts, privilege escalations, and access to sensitive data. Additionally, you could offer samples of log entries that illustrate the types of events being recorded. For instance, a log entry might show a successful or failed login attempt, detailing the user ID, timestamp, and the outcome of the attempt.

Example 1

All security events, including authentication attempts, privilege escalations, and access to sensitive data, are logged in production using Heroku's built-in logging features. These logs are regularly reviewed by our security team to ensure any anomalies are promptly addressed.

Example 2

In our AWS-hosted environment, we utilize CloudTrail and CloudWatch to log all security events across our production infrastructure. These logs are integrated with our SIEM solution for real-time monitoring and alerting, ensuring comprehensive coverage of authentication events, privilege escalations, and access to sensitive data.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and primarily used internally, we do not log security events in the same manner as cloud-hosted solutions. However, we maintain detailed access logs for critical systems and conduct regular audits to ensure compliance with our security policies.

Question

Do you have intrusion detection/prevention systems, WAFs, or anomaly detection with alerting?

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has implemented specific security technologies designed to detect and respond to unauthorized access attempts, web-based attacks, and unusual activities within your network. Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS) and Intrusion Prevention Systems (IPS) monitor network traffic for suspicious activity and potential threats. Web Application Firewalls (WAFs) protect web applications by filtering and monitoring HTTP traffic. Anomaly detection systems identify unusual patterns that may indicate a security incident. All these systems typically include alerting mechanisms to notify security teams when suspicious activities are detected.

Why It Matters:

Having these systems in place is crucial for maintaining the security posture of your organization. They help in early detection of potential threats, allowing your security team to respond promptly and mitigate risks before they can cause significant damage. For example, an IPS can automatically block malicious traffic, while a WAF can protect your web applications from common attacks like SQL injection or cross-site scripting. Anomaly detection can uncover sophisticated threats that might go unnoticed by traditional rule-based systems.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation or configuration details of your IDS/IPS, WAF, and anomaly detection systems. This could include system logs showing detection and prevention activities, alert configurations, and reports of incidents that were identified and mitigated by these systems. Additionally, you might present evidence of regular updates and maintenance of these systems to ensure they remain effective against evolving threats.

Example 1

We utilize Heroku's built-in security features, including their integrated Web Application Firewall (WAF) and anomaly detection capabilities. These systems provide intrusion detection and prevention, with alerting mechanisms in place to notify our security team of any suspicious activities.

Example 2

Our AWS-hosted infrastructure includes Amazon GuardDuty for threat detection, AWS WAF to protect our web applications, and Amazon Inspector for continuous security assessment. These systems are configured to detect intrusions, prevent attacks, and alert our security operations center (SOC) in real-time.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and primarily used internally, we do not employ intrusion detection/prevention systems, WAFs, or anomaly detection with alerting. Our security posture relies on network segmentation, regular vulnerability assessments, and manual monitoring by our security team.

Question

Describe your network vulnerability management program, including scanning frequency, tools used, and remediation SLAs.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking you to detail how your organization identifies, assesses, and addresses potential weaknesses in your network. Essentially, it wants to know how often you check your network for vulnerabilities, what tools you use for these checks, and how quickly you plan to fix any issues that are found.

Why It Matters:

A robust network vulnerability management program is critical for maintaining the security and integrity of your network. Regular scanning helps identify potential security gaps before they can be exploited by attackers. Using reliable tools ensures that these scans are thorough and accurate. Establishing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for remediation provides a clear timeline for addressing vulnerabilities, which helps in minimizing the window of opportunity for attackers.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a document that outlines your vulnerability management policy. This document should specify the frequency of scans (e.g., weekly, monthly), the tools employed (e.g., Nessus, OpenVAS), and the remediation SLAs (e.g., critical vulnerabilities to be addressed within 7 days, high vulnerabilities within 30 days). Additionally, you could include reports from recent scans and evidence of completed remediation actions to show that the program is actively maintained and effective.

Example 1

Our network vulnerability management program involves weekly automated scans using Heroku's built-in security tools and manual reviews every quarter. We utilize third-party tools like Snyk for additional checks. Our remediation SLAs require critical vulnerabilities to be addressed within 7 days and high vulnerabilities within 30 days.

Example 2

We conduct daily automated vulnerability scans across our AWS infrastructure using Qualys and Nessus. Our remediation SLAs are stringent, with critical vulnerabilities requiring resolution within 48 hours and high vulnerabilities within 14 days. We also perform bi-weekly manual penetration tests to complement our automated scans.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and not exposed to the public internet, we do not follow a network vulnerability management program as traditionally defined. However, we perform regular internal security assessments and audits to ensure our systems remain secure.

Question

Describe your application vulnerability management program, including tools and remediation processes.

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking you to detail how your organization identifies, assesses, and addresses vulnerabilities within your applications. An application vulnerability is a weakness that can be exploited by attackers to compromise the application's security. The goal of a vulnerability management program is to systematically find these weaknesses and fix them before they can be exploited. This involves using specific tools to scan for vulnerabilities and having clear processes in place to remediate, or fix, any issues that are found.

Why It Matters:

Having a robust vulnerability management program is crucial for maintaining the security and integrity of your applications. By regularly scanning for vulnerabilities and promptly addressing them, you reduce the risk of security breaches. This not only protects sensitive data but also helps in maintaining customer trust and compliance with regulatory requirements. Effective vulnerability management ensures that your applications remain secure against evolving threats.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate your vulnerability management program, you might provide documentation that outlines the tools used for vulnerability scanning (e.g., Nessus, Qualys), the frequency of scans (e.g., weekly, monthly), and the processes in place for triaging and remediating vulnerabilities. Additionally, you could include reports from recent scans, showing identified vulnerabilities and the actions taken to address them. This evidence should clearly show a proactive approach to managing application security.

Example 1

Our application vulnerability management program utilizes automated scanning tools integrated within our Heroku deployment pipeline. We conduct weekly vulnerability scans using tools like Snyk and immediately address any critical vulnerabilities found, following a predefined remediation workflow that involves our development team.

Example 2

We employ a comprehensive vulnerability management program that includes daily automated scans using Nessus and Qualys across our AWS infrastructure. Our remediation process is well-documented and involves a coordinated effort between our security, development, and operations teams to ensure timely patching and mitigation of identified vulnerabilities.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively deployed on-premises and does not interface with external networks, traditional application vulnerability scanning is not directly applicable. However, we maintain a rigorous patch management process for our infrastructure and conduct regular security reviews to ensure the integrity and security of our applications.

Question

How do you manage patching for your infrastructure? What are your SLAs based on vulnerability severity?

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking about your organization's process for updating and securing its infrastructure through patching. Patching involves applying updates or fixes to software and systems to address known vulnerabilities and improve security. The question also asks about your Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for patching, which are commitments to apply patches within specific timeframes based on the severity of the vulnerability. Severity levels typically include critical, high, medium, and low, with critical vulnerabilities requiring the fastest response.

Why It Matters:

Effective patch management is crucial for maintaining the security and stability of your infrastructure. Vulnerabilities can be exploited by attackers to gain unauthorized access, cause disruptions, or steal data. By establishing clear SLAs for patching based on vulnerability severity, you ensure that the most critical security issues are addressed promptly, reducing the risk of a breach. This demonstrates to stakeholders that your organization is proactive in managing security risks and maintaining a secure environment.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation of your patch management policy, which outlines the procedures for identifying, testing, and applying patches. Additionally, you could share reports or dashboards that show patch application timelines based on vulnerability severity, illustrating how your organization meets its SLAs. For instance, you might show that all critical vulnerabilities are patched within 48 hours, high severity within a week, and medium and low severity within a month.

Example 1

We manage patching for our infrastructure through the PaaS provider, which automatically applies security updates and patches. Our SLAs are based on the provider's vulnerability severity ratings, ensuring that critical vulnerabilities are addressed within 24 hours.

Example 2

Our patch management process involves a dedicated team that monitors vulnerability databases and applies patches to our AWS infrastructure. We have established SLAs where critical vulnerabilities are patched within 48 hours, high severity within a week, and medium and low severity within a month.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and does not rely on cloud infrastructure, the question regarding patching SLAs based on vulnerability severity is not directly applicable to our environment. However, we do conduct regular security assessments and apply patches as needed to maintain the security of our systems.

Question

Do you perform penetration testing? How often, and is it conducted by internal teams or third parties?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization conducts penetration testing, a simulated cyber-attack against your own computer system to check for exploitable vulnerabilities. The frequency of these tests and whether they are performed by your own staff or external experts are also being inquired about. This is important because regular penetration testing helps identify security weaknesses before malicious attackers can exploit them. It ensures that your security measures are effective and that any vulnerabilities are addressed promptly.

Why It Matters and Example Evidence:

Regular penetration testing is a critical component of a robust security posture. It helps ensure that your defenses are up-to-date and effective against current threats. Conducting these tests by third parties can provide an unbiased assessment, as external testers may have different perspectives and techniques compared to your internal team.

For example, evidence of fulfilling this question might include documentation of penetration testing reports conducted by a reputable third-party firm, detailing the findings, the date of the tests, and the actions taken to remediate any identified vulnerabilities. Additionally, maintaining a schedule or policy document that outlines the frequency of these tests (e.g., quarterly or annually) would demonstrate a commitment to ongoing security assessment.

Example 1

We perform penetration testing annually, conducted by a reputable third-party firm. This approach allows us to leverage external expertise and ensure an unbiased assessment of our security posture.

Example 2

Our organization conducts penetration testing quarterly, with a combination of internal team assessments and third-party evaluations. This hybrid approach ensures thorough coverage and allows us to benefit from both internal insights and external expertise.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and does not expose any external-facing services, we do not conduct penetration testing. However, we maintain rigorous internal security reviews and audits to ensure the integrity and security of our systems.

Question

Do you use sub-processors to process customer data? Please provide a list.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization engages third-party vendors or service providers (sub-processors) to handle customer data on your behalf. Essentially, it wants to know if you outsource any data processing tasks and, if so, which specific sub-processors you use. This is crucial because when you involve external entities in handling sensitive data, you extend your security responsibilities to ensure these sub-processors adhere to the same security standards as your organization.

Why It Matters:

Understanding and disclosing the use of sub-processors is vital for several reasons. First, it helps maintain transparency with your customers about who has access to their data. Second, it ensures that all parties involved in data processing comply with relevant data protection regulations, such as GDPR or CCPA. Finally, it allows you to assess the security practices of these sub-processors, ensuring they meet your organization's security requirements and do not introduce vulnerabilities.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a documented list of all sub-processors, including their names, the type of data they process, and the specific services they provide. Additionally, you could include contracts or agreements that outline the security obligations and compliance requirements these sub-processors must adhere to. Regular audits and assessments of these sub-processors' security practices would further evidence your commitment to maintaining high security standards across your entire data processing ecosystem.

Example 1

We utilize Heroku as our primary platform-as-a-service (PaaS) provider for hosting our SaaS application. Additionally, we engage Stripe for payment processing and SendGrid for email delivery services. These sub-processors handle customer data in accordance with their respective data processing agreements, which outline stringent security and compliance requirements.

Example 2

Our SaaS application is hosted on Amazon Web Services (AWS), and we leverage several AWS services for data processing, including Amazon RDS for database management, Amazon S3 for storage, and AWS Lambda for serverless computing. Furthermore, we partner with third-party providers such as Twilio for communications and Datadog for monitoring and analytics. All sub-processors are contractually obligated to adhere to our security standards and undergo regular security assessments.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively deployed on-premises within our clients' environments, we do not engage sub-processors for processing customer data. Therefore, this question is not applicable to our operational model. However, we ensure that our on-premises infrastructure meets rigorous security standards and complies with relevant data protection regulations.

Question

How do you assess the security posture of your third-party vendors and sub-processors?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking how your organization evaluates the security practices and measures of external entities that you work with, such as third-party vendors and sub-processors. Essentially, it wants to know the methods and criteria you use to ensure that these external partners maintain adequate security standards to protect your data and systems. This is crucial because weak security practices by a third party can expose your organization to significant risks, including data breaches and compliance violations.

Why It Matters:

Assessing the security posture of third-party vendors and sub-processors is vital for maintaining the overall security integrity of your organization. When you engage with external entities, you are extending your attack surface. If these partners do not have robust security measures in place, they could become a vulnerable point that malicious actors might exploit to gain access to your systems or data. Therefore, regularly evaluating their security practices helps you identify potential risks early and take appropriate mitigating actions.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate how you assess the security posture of third-party vendors, you might provide documentation such as a Vendor Security Assessment Report. This report could include details on the assessment criteria used (e.g., adherence to industry standards like ISO 27001), the results of security audits or questionnaires completed by the vendors, and any remediation plans or actions taken based on the assessment findings. Additionally, you might include communication logs or meeting minutes where security concerns were discussed and addressed with the vendors.

Example 1

We utilize a standardized questionnaire based on industry best practices to evaluate the security posture of our third-party vendors and sub-processors. This questionnaire covers areas such as data encryption, access controls, incident response plans, and compliance with relevant regulations. Additionally, we review any available security certifications and conduct periodic follow-up assessments to ensure ongoing compliance.

Example 2

Our security team conducts comprehensive assessments of third-party vendors and sub-processors using a combination of questionnaires, on-site audits, and penetration testing. We require all vendors to adhere to our security standards, which are aligned with industry frameworks such as ISO 27001 and NIST. Furthermore, we maintain continuous monitoring and regular re-evaluations to adapt to any changes in the vendor's security posture.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and does not rely on third-party cloud services or external data processing, the assessment of third-party vendors' security posture is not directly applicable to our operations. However, we ensure that any external consultants or service providers we engage with for maintenance or support purposes adhere to strict confidentiality and security agreements.

Question

Do all sub-processors maintain equivalent security and privacy controls to your own?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether the third-party service providers (sub-processors) that your organization uses also have the same level of security and privacy measures in place as your organization does. Essentially, it's about ensuring that any external entities handling your data are just as committed to protecting it as you are. This is crucial because weak links in the security chain can lead to breaches, regardless of how secure your own systems are.

Why It Matters and Practical Example:

Ensuring that sub-processors maintain equivalent security and privacy controls helps protect your data from unauthorized access, breaches, and other security incidents. For example, if your organization uses a cloud storage provider, you need to confirm that this provider has robust encryption, regular security audits, and strict access controls similar to what you have implemented.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this requirement, you might provide documentation such as security assessment reports, compliance certificates (like ISO 27001), or contracts with sub-processors that explicitly state they must adhere to the same security standards as your organization. Regular audits and reviews of these sub-processors' security practices can also serve as evidence that they maintain equivalent controls.

Example 1

All our sub-processors, including our PaaS provider Vercel, are required to maintain security and privacy controls equivalent to our own, as stipulated in our contracts and confirmed through their compliance certifications such as SOC 2.

Example 2

Our sub-processors, which include AWS for hosting and various security tools integrated into our AWS environment, are contractually obligated to uphold security and privacy standards equivalent to ours, demonstrated through regular audits, compliance with ISO 27001, and SOC 2 Type II certifications.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and does not rely on sub-processors for data handling or storage, this question is not applicable to our operational model.

Question

Will you notify customers before engaging new sub-processors who will handle their data?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization informs its customers before you start working with new third-party service providers (sub-processors) that will handle their data. In the context of data security and privacy, sub-processors are entities that your organization engages to perform specific tasks involving customer data, such as cloud storage, data analytics, or customer support services.

Why It Matters:

Notifying customers before engaging new sub-processors is crucial for several reasons. First, it ensures transparency and builds trust with your customers by keeping them informed about who has access to their data. Second, it allows customers to assess the security practices of these new sub-processors and make informed decisions about whether they are comfortable with their data being handled by these third parties. Finally, many data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), require organizations to inform customers about changes in data handling practices, including the engagement of new sub-processors.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that you notify customers before engaging new sub-processors, you might provide documentation of your notification process. This could include templates of notification emails sent to customers, records of customer acknowledgments, or policies outlining the steps your organization takes to inform customers about new sub-processors. Additionally, you could show evidence of customer feedback mechanisms in place to allow customers to voice concerns or objections regarding the engagement of new sub-processors.

Example 1

We notify our customers via email at least 30 days before engaging any new sub-processors. This notification includes details about the sub-processor, the nature of the data that will be handled, and the reasons for the engagement. Customers are given the option to object to the engagement within a specified timeframe.

Example 2

Our policy mandates that customers are informed about new sub-processors through an update in our service terms, accompanied by an email notification. This process is documented in our data processing agreement and is reviewed annually to ensure compliance with relevant data protection regulations. Customers can also access detailed information about our sub-processors on our website.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and does not involve cloud services or third-party data handling, the question of notifying customers about new sub-processors does not apply to our operations. Our data handling is entirely internal, ensuring full control and security over customer data.

Question

Do you have a dedicated information security team? Describe its composition and reporting structure.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has a specific group of people whose main job is to handle information security. The question also wants to know who is in this team and to whom they report. This is important because having a dedicated team shows that your organization takes security seriously and has experts focused on protecting its information.

Why It Matters:

Having a dedicated information security team means there are people whose primary role is to understand and manage security risks. This team typically includes roles like security analysts, auditors, and possibly a Chief Information Security Officer (CISO). Their job is to create and enforce security policies, monitor for threats, and ensure that the organization complies with relevant laws and standards. The reporting structure is crucial because it shows how security fits into the overall organization. If the security team reports directly to top management, it indicates that security is a priority at the highest levels.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that you have a dedicated information security team, you might provide an organizational chart that shows the security team and its members. You could also include job descriptions for key roles within the team, such as the CISO or security analysts. Additionally, documenting the team's responsibilities and how they report to senior management (e.g., through regular security reports or meetings) would further illustrate the structure and importance of the team within your organization.

Example 1

Our information security is managed by an outsourced security consultant who works closely with our development team. This consultant reports directly to our CTO, ensuring that security considerations are integrated into our development processes and overall technology strategy.

Example 2

We have a dedicated information security team consisting of a Chief Information Security Officer (CISO), two security analysts, and a compliance officer. This team reports directly to the Chief Technology Officer (CTO), with regular updates provided to the executive leadership team to ensure alignment with our overall security strategy and compliance requirements.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and tailored for individual client installations, we do not maintain a dedicated information security team. Instead, security responsibilities are integrated into the roles of our IT operations team, who work closely with clients to ensure their specific security needs are met within their own environments.

Question

Do you have a formal Information Security Program? Please provide documentation.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has a structured and documented approach to managing information security. An Information Security Program is a comprehensive framework that outlines how your organization protects its information assets. This includes policies, procedures, standards, and guidelines that ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information. Having a formal program demonstrates that your organization takes security seriously and has a systematic way to manage risks associated with information assets.

Why It Matters and Example Evidence:

A formal Information Security Program is crucial because it helps your organization identify, assess, and mitigate security risks. It ensures that all employees understand their roles and responsibilities regarding security and provides a consistent approach to handling sensitive information. Without a formal program, your organization may lack the necessary controls to protect against data breaches, comply with regulations, and maintain customer trust.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that you have a formal Information Security Program, you might provide documentation such as your Information Security Policy, Risk Management Framework, Incident Response Plan, and training materials for employees. These documents should outline the scope of the program, the governance structure, the risk assessment process, and the specific controls in place to protect information assets. For instance, you could show a Risk Assessment Report that details identified risks, their potential impact, and the mitigation strategies implemented.

Example 1

Our organization has a formal Information Security Program documented in our Information Security Policy, which outlines our approach to protecting sensitive data hosted on Vercel. This policy includes guidelines for data encryption, access controls, and regular security audits. Additionally, we have an Incident Response Plan that details the steps we take in the event of a security breach.

Example 2

We maintain a comprehensive Information Security Program that is integral to our operations on AWS. This program is documented in our Information Security Policy, Risk Management Framework, and Incident Response Plan. These documents are regularly reviewed and updated to adapt to new threats and compliance requirements, ensuring the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of our data.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively deployed on-premises and does not involve cloud services, the concept of a formal Information Security Program as typically defined for cloud environments does not directly apply. However, we do have internal security protocols and procedures in place to protect our information assets, which are documented in our Internal Security Guidelines.

Question

Do your security policies align with industry standards? (ISO 27001, NIST CSF, SOC 2, etc.)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization's security policies are in line with recognized industry standards. These standards, such as ISO 27001, NIST CSF, and SOC 2, provide frameworks and guidelines for managing information security. Aligning with these standards means that your policies are based on best practices that have been developed and refined by security experts over time.

Why It Matters:

Aligning your security policies with industry standards is crucial because it demonstrates that your organization is committed to maintaining a high level of security. These standards cover a wide range of security practices, from risk management and incident response to access control and data protection. By following these guidelines, you can reduce the likelihood of security breaches, protect sensitive information, and ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that your security policies align with industry standards, you might provide documentation showing how your policies map to specific controls outlined in ISO 27001 or NIST CSF. For instance, you could show that your incident response policy includes procedures for detecting, reporting, and mitigating security incidents, which aligns with the "Respond" function in the NIST CSF. Additionally, you might provide evidence of regular audits or assessments conducted by third-party experts to verify that your policies are effectively implemented and maintained in accordance with these standards.

Example 1

Our security policies are aligned with the NIST CSF framework, focusing on key areas such as Identify, Protect, Detect, Respond, and Recover. We utilize Heroku's built-in security features to ensure compliance with these standards, including automated security updates and SSL encryption.

Example 2

Our security policies are fully aligned with ISO 27001 and SOC 2 standards. We have implemented comprehensive controls across our AWS infrastructure, including regular security assessments, access management protocols, and incident response plans that are regularly reviewed and updated.

Example 3

As our software is delivered on-premises and does not involve cloud services, the alignment with industry standards such as ISO 27001 or SOC 2 is not directly applicable. However, we follow rigorous internal security practices and comply with relevant local regulations and industry-specific guidelines.

Question

Is there a formal disciplinary policy for employees who violate security policies?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has a clearly defined and documented policy that outlines the consequences employees will face if they violate security policies. Security policies are rules and guidelines that help protect the organization's information and systems from threats. Examples of security policies include requirements for strong passwords, restrictions on sharing sensitive information, and procedures for reporting security incidents.

Why It Matters:

Having a formal disciplinary policy for security policy violations is crucial because it sets clear expectations for employee behavior and helps maintain a secure environment. When employees know the consequences of not following security policies, they are more likely to adhere to them. This, in turn, reduces the risk of security breaches caused by human error or negligence.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that your organization has a formal disciplinary policy for security policy violations, you might provide a document that outlines the policy. This document should detail the steps that will be taken in response to different types of violations, such as verbal warnings, written warnings, suspension, or termination. Additionally, you could show records of past incidents where the policy was enforced, illustrating how the organization consistently applies the policy to maintain security.

Example 1

Our company has a formal disciplinary policy for employees who violate security policies. This policy includes verbal warnings for minor infractions, written warnings for more serious violations, and potential termination for repeated or severe breaches. The policy is clearly communicated to all employees during onboarding and through regular training sessions.

Example 2

We maintain a comprehensive formal disciplinary policy for employees who violate security policies. This policy is integrated into our broader HR framework and includes progressive disciplinary actions such as performance improvement plans, suspensions, and ultimately termination for egregious violations. The policy is regularly reviewed and updated to align with industry best practices and legal requirements.

Example 3

While our organization primarily focuses on pre-sales consulting services and does not host customer data, we still have a formal disciplinary policy for employees who violate security policies. This policy includes mandatory security training, written warnings, and potential termination for repeated violations. The policy is designed to ensure that our consultants maintain high security standards when interacting with client environments.

Question

Are all personnel required to sign confidentiality/NDA agreements as a condition of employment?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization mandates that all employees sign confidentiality or Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA) before they start working. Confidentiality agreements are legal contracts that require employees to keep certain information private, both during and after their employment. This is crucial for protecting sensitive data, such as trade secrets, customer information, and other proprietary data that could harm the organization if disclosed.

Why It Matters:

Ensuring that all personnel sign confidentiality agreements helps protect the organization's sensitive information from being inadvertently or deliberately shared with unauthorized parties. This is particularly important in industries where proprietary information is a significant asset, such as technology, pharmaceuticals, and finance. By requiring these agreements, the organization can take legal action against employees who breach confidentiality, thereby deterring potential leaks and safeguarding critical information.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this requirement, you might provide a copy of the standard confidentiality agreement used by your organization, along with records or a system report showing that all current employees have signed this agreement upon hire. Additionally, you could include documentation of the onboarding process that outlines the requirement for signing the agreement as a condition of employment.

Example 1

All personnel are required to sign a standard confidentiality agreement as a condition of employment. This agreement outlines the obligations to maintain the confidentiality of sensitive information and proprietary data, both during and after their tenure with the company.

Example 2

As part of our comprehensive onboarding process, all employees are mandated to sign confidentiality and NDA agreements. These agreements are tailored to the specific roles and access levels within the organization, ensuring that sensitive information is protected across all departments.

Example 3

While our organization primarily focuses on pre-configured, off-the-shelf software solutions, we do require all personnel to acknowledge and agree to our confidentiality policy during the onboarding process. This policy, although not a formal NDA, outlines the expectations for maintaining the confidentiality of any sensitive information they may encounter.

Question

Do you conduct security awareness training for all employees? Describe the frequency and content.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization regularly trains all employees on security practices. It wants to know how often this training happens and what topics are covered. Security awareness training is crucial because employees are often the first line of defense against cyber threats. By educating them on common threats like phishing emails, social engineering, and safe password practices, organizations can significantly reduce the risk of security breaches caused by human error.

Why It Matters and Example Evidence:

Regular security awareness training helps ensure that all employees understand their role in maintaining the organization's security posture. The frequency of training—whether it's annual, bi-annual, or more frequent—shows commitment to keeping security top-of-mind. The content should include practical examples, such as how to recognize a phishing email or the importance of not sharing passwords.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation showing the schedule of training sessions, along with outlines or summaries of the topics covered. This could include certificates of completion for employees, training materials, or records of simulated phishing tests conducted to reinforce learning.

Example 1

We conduct security awareness training for all employees quarterly. The training covers topics such as recognizing phishing attempts, safe password practices, and the importance of reporting suspicious activities. Additionally, we provide simulated phishing tests to reinforce learning and ensure employees are prepared to handle real-world threats.

Example 2

Our organization conducts security awareness training for all employees on a bi-annual basis. The training includes modules on advanced phishing techniques, secure data handling practices, and the latest cybersecurity threats. We also hold monthly brief refresher sessions and conduct regular simulated attacks to maintain a high level of security awareness among our staff.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and our operations do not involve handling sensitive customer data, we have not implemented formal security awareness training for all employees. However, we do provide ad-hoc training sessions when necessary and ensure that all staff are aware of basic security practices relevant to our environment.

Question

Describe your Security Incident Response Plan. Please provide documentation.

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking you to detail your organization's plan for responding to security incidents. A security incident is any event that could compromise the confidentiality, integrity, or availability of your organization's information systems and data. Examples include data breaches, malware infections, and unauthorized access attempts. The Security Incident Response Plan (SIRP) outlines the steps your organization will take to identify, contain, eradicate, and recover from security incidents. This plan is crucial because it ensures that your organization can respond quickly and effectively to minimize damage and prevent future incidents.

Why It Matters and What to Include

Having a well-defined SIRP is essential for maintaining the trust of your stakeholders, protecting sensitive information, and ensuring business continuity. The plan should include clear roles and responsibilities, communication protocols, and step-by-step procedures for different types of incidents. It should also cover how incidents are logged, analyzed, and reported. For example, if a data breach occurs, the plan should detail who will be notified, how the breach will be contained, and what steps will be taken to recover and prevent future breaches. Providing documentation, such as incident response templates, communication plans, and training materials, will demonstrate that your organization is prepared to handle security incidents effectively.

Example 1

Our Security Incident Response Plan (SIRP) is designed to address security incidents promptly and effectively. It outlines clear roles and responsibilities for our small team, communication protocols, and step-by-step procedures for identifying, containing, eradicating, and recovering from incidents. Given our use of a PaaS provider like Heroku, our plan leverages their built-in security features and incident response capabilities, supplemented by our internal procedures for logging, analyzing, and reporting incidents.

Example 2

Our SIRP is a comprehensive document that details our advanced procedures for handling security incidents. It includes dedicated incident response teams, detailed communication plans, and integration with our AWS environment for automated incident detection and response. The plan covers a range of scenarios, from data breaches to malware infections, and ensures that all incidents are logged, analyzed, and reported in accordance with our policies and regulatory requirements.

Example 3

While our product is an on-premises software solution with minimal exposure to external security threats, we have a Security Incident Response Plan in place for any potential incidents. This plan outlines our procedures for identifying, containing, and resolving any security issues that may arise, ensuring the integrity and availability of our software. However, given the nature of our product, the plan is more focused on internal security practices and less on external incident response.

Question

What are your SLAs for notifying customers of a security incident affecting their data?

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking about your organization's Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for informing customers when there is a security incident that impacts their data. An SLA is a formal commitment that outlines the level of service expected between a service provider and its clients. In this context, the SLA specifies how quickly and in what manner your organization will notify customers if their data is compromised in a security incident.

Why It Matters:

Timely notification of security incidents is crucial for several reasons. First, it allows customers to take immediate action to protect themselves, such as changing passwords or monitoring their accounts for suspicious activity. Second, it demonstrates transparency and accountability, which can help maintain customer trust. Finally, many regulations and industry standards require organizations to notify affected parties within a specific timeframe following a security incident. Failure to do so can result in legal and financial consequences.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a documented SLA that outlines the specific timeframes and methods for notifying customers of a security incident. For instance, the SLA might state that customers will be notified within 24 hours of detecting a security incident via email and a posted notice on your website. Additionally, you could include records or logs of past notifications to show how you have adhered to these SLAs in practice.

Example 1

Our SLAs commit to notifying customers of any security incident affecting their data within 48 hours of detection. Notifications are sent via email and are also posted on our status page for transparency.

Example 2

We maintain stringent SLAs for security incident notifications, committing to inform customers within 24 hours of detection through multiple channels including email, SMS, and updates on our dedicated security incident page.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises at customer sites, the responsibility for managing and responding to security incidents, including notifications, lies with the customer. Therefore, this SLA does not apply to our service model.

Question

Are employee endpoints (laptops/desktops) centrally managed with security controls? (encryption, EDR, patching, etc.)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether the organization has a centralized system in place to manage and secure employee devices such as laptops and desktops. Central management means using a single platform or tool to oversee and apply security measures across all devices. The specific security controls mentioned include encryption (protecting data by converting it into a secure format), Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR, which monitors and responds to threats on devices), and patching (regularly updating software to fix vulnerabilities).

Why It Matters:

Centrally managing security controls ensures that all employee devices adhere to the organization's security policies consistently. This approach helps protect sensitive data, reduces the risk of cyber attacks, and ensures that devices are up-to-date with the latest security patches. For example, if a new vulnerability is discovered in an operating system, a centrally managed system can quickly apply the necessary patch to all devices, minimizing the window of opportunity for attackers.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, an organization might provide documentation or configuration reports showing the use of a centralized management platform (like Microsoft Intune or Jamf) that applies encryption policies, deploys EDR solutions (like CrowdStrike or Microsoft Defender for Endpoint), and automates patch management. Additionally, audit logs showing regular updates and security scans across all employee devices would serve as strong evidence of effective central management.

Example 1

All employee endpoints are centrally managed using Microsoft Intune. Security controls such as BitLocker encryption, Microsoft Defender for Endpoint, and automated patching are consistently applied across all devices.

Example 2

Employee endpoints are centrally managed via Jamf Pro. We utilize FileVault for encryption, Jamf Threat for EDR, and automated patch management to ensure all devices are secure and up-to-date.

Example 3

Our software is deployed on-premises and does not involve employee endpoints connecting to our systems. Therefore, centralized management of employee endpoints is not applicable to our security posture.

Question

Is MFA required for employees/contractors to access production systems and corporate resources?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization enforces the use of Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) for employees and contractors when they access production systems and corporate resources. MFA is a security measure that requires users to provide two or more verification factors to gain access to a resource such as an application, online account, or a VPN. The purpose of this requirement is to add an extra layer of security beyond just a username and password, making it significantly harder for unauthorized users to gain access even if they have obtained someone's credentials.

Why It Matters:

Enabling MFA helps protect against various types of attacks, including phishing, where attackers might steal passwords. With MFA in place, even if an attacker gets a user's password, they would still need the additional factor (like a code sent to the user's phone) to gain access. This greatly reduces the risk of unauthorized access to sensitive systems and data. For production systems and corporate resources, which often contain critical and sensitive information, ensuring that MFA is required is a fundamental security practice.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that MFA is required, you might provide documentation or configuration settings from your authentication system showing that MFA is enforced for all users accessing production systems. Additionally, you could show logs or reports indicating that users are required to complete MFA challenges when they log in, and any exceptions or failures to comply are promptly addressed.

Example 1

Our organization enforces the use of Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) for all employees and contractors when accessing production systems and corporate resources hosted on Vercel. This policy is implemented through our identity provider, which requires users to authenticate using a combination of their password and a time-based one-time password (TOTP) generated by an authenticator app.

Example 2

We require Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) for all employees and contractors accessing our production systems and corporate resources hosted on AWS. This requirement is enforced through our centralized identity and access management system, which integrates with AWS IAM to ensure that MFA is mandatory for any access to our AWS environment, including via the AWS Management Console and API.

Example 3

While our organization primarily operates on-premises software solutions, we do not enforce Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) for accessing these systems. Our security posture relies on network segmentation, regular security audits, and strict access control policies to protect our on-premises resources. However, for any cloud-based services we utilize, MFA is required as an additional layer of security.

Question

Do you perform background checks on personnel who handle sensitive data?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization conducts background checks on employees or contractors who have access to sensitive data. Sensitive data can include personal information, financial records, intellectual property, or any other data that could cause significant harm if exposed. The purpose of background checks is to verify the trustworthiness and reliability of individuals who will be handling this data. This helps ensure that they do not pose a risk to the organization through malicious actions, negligence, or other security threats.

Why It Matters:

Performing background checks is a critical security measure because it helps mitigate the risk of insider threats. Insider threats can come from current or former employees, contractors, or business partners who have or had authorized access to an organization's data or information systems. By verifying an individual's past behavior, criminal history, and professional references, organizations can make more informed hiring decisions and reduce the likelihood of data breaches or other security incidents caused by internal actors.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that your organization performs background checks, you might provide documentation of your background check policy, including the criteria used for evaluation (e.g., criminal history, employment history, education verification). Additionally, you could show records or reports of completed background checks for personnel who handle sensitive data, along with any follow-up actions taken based on the findings (e.g., additional training, access restrictions). This evidence should clearly show that background checks are a standard part of your hiring and onboarding processes for roles involving sensitive data.

Example 1

We conduct background checks on all personnel who handle sensitive data as part of our onboarding process. These checks include verification of employment history, education, and a review of any past criminal activity to ensure the security and reliability of our data handling practices.

Example 2

Our organization performs comprehensive background checks on all employees and contractors with access to sensitive data. This includes criminal background checks, credit checks, and verification of professional references. These checks are part of our rigorous hiring process and are crucial for maintaining the integrity and security of our data.

Example 3

Given that our software is exclusively on-premises and does not involve handling sensitive data as defined by external cloud or SaaS standards, we do not perform background checks specifically for data handling roles. However, we do conduct standard employment verifications for all hires.

Question

Please describe the service/application being provided.

Explainer

Explanation:

This question is asking for a detailed description of the service or application that your organization is offering. The goal is to understand what the service does, how it operates, and what kind of data or resources it interacts with. This information is crucial for assessing potential security risks and ensuring that appropriate security measures are in place.

Why it matters:

Knowing the specifics of the service or application helps security professionals identify potential vulnerabilities and threats. For example, if the service handles sensitive customer data, there needs to be robust data protection measures in place. If it's an application that integrates with third-party services, there should be protocols to ensure those integrations are secure.

Example of evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a document that includes:
- A high-level overview of the service or application.
- The type of data it processes or stores.
- Any third-party services it integrates with.
- The intended users and their roles.
- A brief description of the technology stack used.

Example 1

Our service is a project management tool hosted on Heroku, designed to help small teams collaborate on tasks and projects. It processes non-sensitive project data, user-generated content, and integrates with third-party calendar services for scheduling. The intended users are team members and project managers.

Example 2

Our application is a comprehensive customer relationship management (CRM) system hosted on AWS, which manages customer data, sales pipelines, and marketing campaigns. It integrates with various third-party services for email marketing, customer support, and analytics. The application is used by sales teams, marketing professionals, and customer support staff.

Example 3

Our offering is an on-premises enterprise resource planning (ERP) software that manages financials, supply chain, and human resources for large organizations. As it is deployed on-premises, it does not interact with cloud services or third-party integrations, thereby reducing the relevance of this question in the context of our service.

Question

What technology stack is the application built on? (languages, frameworks, databases, etc.)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking you to list all the technologies used to build your application. This includes programming languages (like Python, Java, or JavaScript), frameworks (like Django, Spring, or React), and databases (like MySQL, MongoDB, or PostgreSQL). Understanding the technology stack is crucial because different technologies come with their own security considerations and vulnerabilities. For example, certain versions of a programming language might have known security flaws, or a specific database might require particular security configurations to protect data.

Why It Matters:

Knowing the technology stack helps security professionals assess the potential risks associated with your application. Each technology has its own set of common vulnerabilities and security best practices. For instance, if your application uses an older version of a framework, it might be vulnerable to attacks that have been patched in newer versions. Similarly, different databases have different security mechanisms for protecting data.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate this, you might provide a document that lists all the technologies used. For example:

- **Programming Language**: Python 3.8
- **Framework**: Django 3.2
- **Database**: PostgreSQL 13
- **Frontend Framework**: React 17
- **Authentication**: OAuth 2.0

Example 1

The application is built using Python 3.9 with the Flask framework for backend services. It utilizes a PostgreSQL database for data storage and SQLite for local development environments. The frontend is developed using React 17, and authentication is managed through OAuth 2.0. The application is hosted on Heroku, leveraging its PaaS capabilities for deployment and scaling.

Example 2

The application is constructed using Java 11 with the Spring Boot framework, ensuring robust backend functionality. It employs Amazon RDS with PostgreSQL for database management and Amazon S3 for file storage. The frontend is built with Angular 12, providing a dynamic user interface. Authentication is handled through AWS Cognito, and the entire infrastructure is managed on AWS, utilizing EC2, Lambda, and API Gateway services.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and not exposed to the internet, the specific technology stack is less relevant to external security assessments. However, for internal purposes, the application is built using C# with the.NET framework, SQL Server for the database, and a custom-built frontend. Security measures are implemented according to internal policies and standards, focusing on network segmentation and access controls.

Question

What are your uptime/availability SLAs?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking about your Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for uptime and availability. Uptime refers to the amount of time a system or service is operational and accessible, while availability is a measure of how often the system is up and running versus being down. SLAs are formal commitments that specify the level of service you promise to deliver to your users or customers. These agreements typically include metrics such as the percentage of time the service will be available (e.g., 99.9% uptime) and the maximum allowable downtime within a given period.

Why It Matters:

Understanding and clearly defining your uptime and availability SLAs is crucial for several reasons. First, it sets clear expectations for your users or customers regarding the reliability and performance of your service. Second, it helps you prioritize and allocate resources effectively to meet these commitments. Finally, in the event of a service outage, having well-defined SLAs can guide your response and recovery efforts, ensuring that you address the issue promptly and communicate transparently with your users.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a document outlining your SLAs, including specific uptime and availability targets. For instance, you could show an SLA that guarantees 99.9% uptime over a rolling 12-month period, with no single outage lasting more than 30 minutes. Additionally, you might include reports or dashboards that track your actual uptime and availability against these targets, showing your commitment to meeting or exceeding the agreed-upon standards.

Example 1

Our uptime/availability SLAs are based on the standard offerings provided by our PaaS provider, which guarantees a 99.9% uptime. We monitor our service to ensure we meet these SLAs and work closely with our provider to address any issues that may arise.

Example 2

We have established uptime/availability SLAs that guarantee 99.95% uptime over a rolling 12-month period. Our infrastructure is designed with redundancy and failover mechanisms to ensure high availability, and we conduct regular reviews and audits to ensure compliance with these SLAs.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises at our clients' locations, we do not have formal uptime/availability SLAs. However, we provide best practice guidelines and support to help our clients maintain high availability of our software within their own environments.

Question

Describe your business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking you to detail the processes and systems your organization has in place to ensure it can continue operating during and after a significant disruption. Business continuity refers to the plans and procedures that keep the organization running during an adverse event, while disaster recovery specifically addresses the IT systems and data that need to be restored after a disaster.

Why It Matters:

Having robust business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities is crucial because disruptions can come from various sources, such as natural disasters, cyber-attacks, or even human error. These capabilities ensure that your organization can quickly recover and continue its critical functions, minimizing downtime and financial loss. For example, if a flood damages your primary data center, your disaster recovery plan should outline how you will switch to a backup data center to keep services running.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate your business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities, you might provide documentation of your business continuity plan (BCP) and disaster recovery plan (DRP). These documents should include detailed procedures for various scenarios, contact information for key personnel, and regular testing results to show that the plans are effective and up-to-date. Additionally, you could show evidence of recent disaster recovery drills and the outcomes, highlighting any improvements made based on those drills.

Example 1

Our business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities are primarily managed through our Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) provider, which includes automated backups, data replication, and failover mechanisms. We conduct quarterly reviews of our PaaS provider's disaster recovery plans and ensure our data is encrypted both at rest and in transit.

Example 2

We have comprehensive business continuity and disaster recovery plans that include multi-region data replication, automated failover systems, and regular disaster recovery drills. Our plans are documented, reviewed annually, and tested through simulated disaster scenarios to ensure we can maintain operations with minimal downtime.

Example 3

As our software is primarily on-premises and not reliant on external cloud services, our business continuity primarily involves regular data backups, redundant hardware, and manual disaster recovery procedures. While we do not have a formal disaster recovery plan for cloud-based disruptions, we ensure our on-premises systems are secure and regularly maintained.

Question

Will you sign a Data Processing Agreement (DPA)?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization is willing to enter into a Data Processing Agreement (DPA) with another party. A DPA is a legal contract that outlines the responsibilities of both parties when processing personal data. It is commonly required under data protection regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union. The DPA ensures that both parties understand and agree to their obligations regarding the protection, confidentiality, and secure handling of personal data.

Why It Matters:

Signing a DPA is crucial for compliance with data protection laws and for building trust with partners and customers. It demonstrates your organization's commitment to protecting personal data and ensures that both parties are aligned on their responsibilities. For example, if your organization is providing a service that involves handling customer data for another company, a DPA will specify how that data should be protected, who is responsible for data breaches, and the steps to be taken in case of an incident. This not only helps in maintaining compliance but also mitigates the risk of data breaches and associated penalties.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate willingness to sign a DPA, you might provide a template of your standard DPA or a signed DPA from a previous agreement. This shows that your organization has a established process for handling such agreements and is committed to protecting personal data in accordance with legal requirements.

Example 1

We are fully committed to data protection and are willing to sign a Data Processing Agreement (DPA) with any partner or client that requires it. Our standard DPA template is available upon request and has been reviewed by our legal team to ensure compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

Example 2

We take data protection seriously and are prepared to sign a Data Processing Agreement (DPA) with any entity that requires it. Our DPAs are tailored to meet the specific needs of our clients and partners, ensuring that all parties are aligned on their responsibilities regarding data protection.

Example 3

While our software is primarily deployed on-premises and does not involve the transfer of personal data to third parties, we understand the importance of Data Processing Agreements (DPAs) for cloud-based services. For any cloud components we utilize, we are willing to sign a DPA to ensure compliance with data protection regulations.

Question

In the event of a data breach involving personal data, do you commit to notifying the customer within 72 hours?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has a policy to inform customers within 72 hours if there is a data breach that compromises their personal information. Personal data typically includes names, addresses, social security numbers, and other sensitive information that can identify an individual.

Why It Matters:

Quick notification is crucial because it allows affected customers to take immediate action to protect themselves, such as changing passwords or monitoring their accounts for fraudulent activity. Many regulations, like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union, mandate that organizations notify individuals of a data breach within a specific timeframe to ensure transparency and trust. Failing to notify customers promptly can result in legal penalties and damage to your organization's reputation.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this requirement, your organization might provide a documented incident response plan that outlines the steps taken in the event of a data breach. This plan should detail how the breach is identified, assessed, and how notifications are sent to affected customers within the 72-hour window. Additionally, maintaining logs of past breach notifications, including timestamps and communication records, can serve as evidence that the policy is being followed.

Example 1

We commit to notifying our customers within 72 hours of detecting a data breach involving personal data. Our incident response plan, which is reviewed quarterly, includes immediate assessment of the breach, containment measures, and a communication protocol for notifying affected customers via email and our platform.

Example 2

In the event of a data breach involving personal data, we have a comprehensive incident response plan that mandates customer notification within 72 hours. This plan is integrated with our AWS-hosted infrastructure and involves automated alerting systems, dedicated breach response teams, and a multi-channel notification strategy to ensure timely communication with affected customers.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and does not involve the storage or processing of personal data in the cloud, the 72-hour notification requirement does not directly apply to our operations. However, we maintain robust security practices and incident response protocols to protect customer data and address any potential breaches promptly.

Question

Will you delete or return all customer data at the end of the contract, at the customer's choice?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has a process in place to handle customer data after the contract between your organization and the customer ends. Specifically, it wants to know if you can either permanently delete all customer data or return it to the customer, based on their preference. This is important because customers need assurance that their data will not be retained or used without their consent after the contractual relationship ends.

Security Context and Importance:

Properly managing customer data after the end of a contract is crucial for maintaining trust and compliance with data protection regulations. Deleting or returning data ensures that sensitive information is not left vulnerable to unauthorized access or breaches. It also demonstrates your organization's commitment to data privacy and security. For example, if a customer chooses to have their data deleted, your organization must ensure that the data is removed from all systems and backups to prevent any possibility of recovery. If the customer opts to have their data returned, you must provide it in a secure and usable format. Evidence of fulfilling this requirement could include data deletion logs, confirmation from the customer that they received their data, or documentation of the data destruction process.

Example 1

Upon contract termination, we provide customers with the choice to have their data either securely returned or permanently deleted. Data can be exported in standard formats (CSV, JSON) within 30 days of the contract end date. If deletion is chosen, we ensure all customer data is removed from our production systems and backups within 90 days, and we provide a written certificate of destruction upon request.

Example 2

At the end of a contract, customers can choose to have their data returned or deleted in accordance with our data retention policy. For data return, we offer secure export via our API or downloadable archives from our AWS-hosted platform. For deletion, we follow a certified data destruction process that covers all primary databases, replicas, and backups across our cloud infrastructure. Automated workflows ensure complete purging within 90 days, and customers receive a formal confirmation of deletion.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises within the customer's own environment, customers retain full control of their data at all times. Upon contract termination, we revoke any remote access or support credentials and provide guidance on securely removing our software from their systems. Since customer data resides entirely within the client's infrastructure, data return or deletion is managed directly by the customer, though we offer support during the offboarding process if needed.

Question

Do you warrant that you will not use customer data for purposes beyond providing the contracted service?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization guarantees that it will only use customer data for the specific purposes outlined in your service contract. In other words, it wants to ensure that customer data won't be used for any other purposes, such as marketing, selling to third parties, or any other activities not directly related to providing the agreed-upon service. This is a critical aspect of data privacy and trust, as customers need to know that their data is handled responsibly and within the boundaries of what they have agreed to.

Why It Matters and Example Evidence:

Ensuring that customer data is used only for contracted purposes helps protect customer privacy and maintains trust. It also helps your organization comply with data protection regulations, which can have serious consequences if violated.

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, your organization might provide evidence such as a data usage policy that clearly outlines how customer data will be used, internal training records showing that employees understand these policies, and audit logs that show data access is limited to those purposes. Additionally, contracts with customers could include clauses that explicitly state the limited use of their data, reinforcing this commitment.

Example 1

We warrant that customer data will only be used for providing the contracted service. This commitment is outlined in our data usage policy and reinforced through regular employee training sessions.

Example 2

Our organization strictly adheres to the principle of using customer data solely for the purposes defined in our service contracts. This is ensured through rigorous internal audits, clear contractual clauses, and a robust data governance framework.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and customer data never leaves the client's environment, the question of data usage beyond contracted services does not apply. We focus on ensuring the security and integrity of the data within the client's infrastructure.

Question

Does the customer retain ownership of all data provided to you?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether the organization retains full ownership and control over any data that it provides to a third party, such as a service provider or vendor. In other words, it seeks to confirm that the organization does not relinquish its rights to the data it shares. This is crucial because data ownership affects how the data can be used, stored, and protected. If the organization does not retain ownership, it may lose control over its data, leading to potential misuse, unauthorized access, or inadequate protection.

Why It Matters:

Retaining ownership of data is essential for maintaining control and ensuring that the data is handled according to the organization's policies and standards. It ensures that the organization can enforce data protection measures, comply with regulations (such as GDPR or HIPAA), and maintain trust with its customers. Without ownership, the third party might use the data in ways that are not aligned with the organization's interests or legal requirements, potentially leading to data breaches, legal liabilities, and reputational damage.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that the organization retains ownership of all data provided to a third party, the organization might provide a copy of the data processing agreement (DPA) or terms of service contract. This document should explicitly state that the organization retains full ownership of its data. Additionally, the organization could show internal policies or procedures that outline how data is managed and protected when shared with third parties, reinforcing their commitment to data ownership and control.

Example 1

Customers retain full ownership of all data provided to us. This is explicitly stated in our data processing agreement (DPA) and reinforced through our internal data management policies.

Example 2

Customers retain ownership of all data they provide to us. This is clearly outlined in our terms of service and supported by our infrastructure and operational practices designed to protect customer data.

Example 3

As a provider of on-premises software solutions, the concept of data ownership by customers is inherent to our model. However, for any data shared with external service providers, we ensure through contractual agreements that customers retain full ownership and control over their data.

Question

Which security certifications do you hold? (SOC 2 Type II, ISO 27001, etc.)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking you to list any formal security certifications your organization has obtained. Security certifications are third-party validations that your organization meets specific security standards and best practices. Common examples include SOC 2 Type II, which assesses the effectiveness of your security controls, and ISO 27001, which focuses on information security management.

Why It Matters:

Holding security certifications demonstrates to clients, partners, and regulators that your organization is committed to maintaining high security standards. It provides assurance that you have implemented robust security measures and are regularly audited by independent bodies. This can enhance trust, improve your organization's reputation, and may be a requirement for doing business with certain entities.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a copy of your SOC 2 Type II report or ISO 27001 certification. These documents are issued by the certifying body after a thorough audit and review of your security practices. They serve as official proof that your organization has met the stringent requirements of the certification.

Example 1

We have obtained the SOC 2 Type II certification, which validates our commitment to maintaining robust security controls and practices as assessed by an independent third party.

Example 2

Our organization holds both SOC 2 Type II and ISO 27001 certifications, demonstrating our adherence to stringent security standards and our comprehensive approach to information security management.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively deployed on-premises at our clients' locations, we do not pursue external security certifications. However, we ensure that our product meets or exceeds industry security standards through regular internal audits and assessments.

Question

Please provide copies of your most recent audit reports (SOC 2 report, ISO certificate, penetration test summary).

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking you to share documentation that demonstrates your organization has undergone rigorous security assessments and audits. Specifically, it requests three types of reports: a SOC 2 report, an ISO certificate, and a penetration test summary. These documents serve as evidence that your organization adheres to high security standards and regularly evaluates its security posture.

Why It Matters:

These audit reports are critical because they provide third-party validation of your security practices. A **SOC 2 repor**t shows that your organization meets the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) standards for managing customer data. An **ISO certificat**e (such as ISO 27001) indicates that your information security management system aligns with international best practices. A **penetration test summar**y details the results of simulated cyber-attacks conducted by security experts to identify vulnerabilities in your systems. Providing these reports assures stakeholders that your organization is committed to maintaining robust security measures.

Example of Evidence:

To fulfill this question, you might provide a SOC 2 Type II report from a reputable auditing firm, an ISO 27001 certification document issued by an accredited certification body, and a summary report from a recent penetration test performed by a trusted security firm. These documents should be up-to-date and clearly demonstrate your organization's compliance with the relevant standards and the outcomes of security assessments.

Example 1

We have recently completed a SOC 2 Type II audit and have undergone a penetration test by a reputable third-party firm. However, due to our current size and resource constraints, we have not yet pursued ISO certification. The SOC 2 report and penetration test summary are available upon request.

Example 2

We have undergone a SOC 2 Type II audit, obtained ISO 27001 certification, and regularly conduct penetration tests. These reports are available for review and demonstrate our commitment to maintaining high security standards.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and does not handle sensitive customer data, we have not pursued SOC 2 or ISO certifications. However, we conduct regular internal security assessments and penetration tests to ensure the integrity and security of our systems. A summary of our latest penetration test is available upon request.

Question

Do you conduct regular internal security audits? Describe scope and frequency.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization performs routine checks on its own security practices and measures. An internal security audit is a systematic review of the organization's security policies, procedures, and systems to ensure they are effective, compliant with relevant standards, and aligned with the organization's security goals. The question also asks for the scope and frequency of these audits. Scope refers to what areas or systems are included in the audits, while frequency indicates how often these audits are conducted.

Why It Matters:

Regular internal security audits are crucial because they help identify vulnerabilities, ensure compliance with security policies, and verify that security measures are working as intended. By conducting these audits, organizations can proactively address security weaknesses before they are exploited by attackers. Additionally, regular audits demonstrate a commitment to maintaining a secure environment, which can be important for compliance with industry regulations and for building trust with customers and partners.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that your organization conducts regular internal security audits, you could provide documentation such as audit reports, schedules, and summaries of findings and actions taken. For instance, you might show a yearly audit schedule that outlines when different parts of the organization are reviewed, along with reports from recent audits that detail the scope, findings, and any corrective actions implemented. This evidence should clearly show the systematic and recurring nature of your internal security audits.

Example 1

We conduct quarterly internal security audits focused on our application security, data protection measures, and compliance with relevant security standards. These audits are performed by our dedicated security team and include reviews of our Heroku-hosted infrastructure, access controls, and incident response procedures.

Example 2

Our organization performs bi-annual comprehensive internal security audits that cover all aspects of our AWS-hosted infrastructure, including network security, cloud resource configurations, and data encryption practices. These audits involve cross-functional teams and are aligned with industry best practices and regulatory requirements.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and tailored to client specifications, we do not conduct regular internal security audits in the traditional sense. However, we perform security reviews as part of our development and deployment processes to ensure that our solutions meet client-specific security requirements and industry standards.

Question

Do you engage third parties to conduct independent security audits? Describe scope and frequency.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization hires external, unbiased third-party experts to evaluate the security of your systems, applications, or processes. The goal of these audits is to get an objective assessment of your security posture, identify vulnerabilities, and ensure that your security practices align with industry standards and regulations. The question also asks you to describe the scope (what is covered in the audit) and the frequency (how often these audits are conducted).

Why It Matters:

Engaging third parties for independent security audits is crucial because it provides an unbiased evaluation of your security measures. Internal teams might overlook certain issues due to familiarity or limited perspective, whereas external auditors bring fresh eyes and expertise. Regular audits help ensure that your security practices are up-to-date, effective, and compliant with relevant standards. This can also build trust with customers and partners who may require proof of robust security practices.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a report from a recent third-party security audit. This report should detail the scope of the audit, such as the systems, applications, or processes that were reviewed, and the specific security controls that were assessed. Additionally, you should include information on the frequency of these audits, such as annually or bi-annually. For instance, you could show a summary of an annual audit report conducted by a reputable security firm, highlighting the areas reviewed and the findings.

Example 1

We engage a third-party security firm to conduct an annual security audit of our Heroku-hosted application. The audit covers our application's security configurations, data encryption practices, and adherence to industry standards such as GDPR and HIPAA.

Example 2

We contract with a specialized security firm to perform bi-annual comprehensive security audits of our AWS-hosted infrastructure. These audits assess our cloud security posture, including network security, identity and access management, and compliance with frameworks like ISO 27001 and SOC 2.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and tailored for internal use within our organization, we do not engage third parties for independent security audits. Our security practices are regularly reviewed internally to ensure they meet our organizational standards and relevant regulations.

Question

Is your Privacy Policy publicly available? Please provide the URL.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has a Privacy Policy that is accessible to the public. A Privacy Policy is a document that outlines how your organization collects, uses, discloses, and manages a customer's or employee's data. It serves as a transparency measure, informing individuals about their data rights and the organization's data handling practices. Making this policy publicly available ensures that anyone can review it, which is crucial for building trust with users and complying with various data protection regulations.

Why It Matters and Practical Example:

Having a publicly available Privacy Policy is essential for several reasons. It demonstrates your organization's commitment to transparency and accountability regarding data protection. It also helps in complying with legal requirements, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe, which mandates that organizations inform individuals about their data processing activities.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you would provide a direct URL to your organization's Privacy Policy that is hosted on your public-facing website. This URL should lead to a clearly written document that outlines your data handling practices and is easily accessible to anyone visiting your site.

Example 1

Our Privacy Policy is publicly available and can be accessed at https://www.ourcompany.com/privacy-policy. This policy outlines how we collect, use, and protect user data when they interact with our SaaS platform hosted on Heroku.

Example 2

You can find our comprehensive Privacy Policy at https://www.ourcompany.com/privacy. This document details our data handling practices, including how we store and process information in our AWS-hosted environment, and is regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with global data protection standards.

Example 3

While our product is an on-premises software solution with minimal data collection, we have documented our data handling practices internally. These practices are shared with clients upon request, but are not publicly available as the nature of our software does not require a traditional online Privacy Policy.

Question

Do you have a mechanism to respond to data subject access requests (DSARs) within required timeframes?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has a structured process in place to handle data subject access requests (DSARs). A DSAR is a formal request by an individual to access personal data that an organization holds about them. This is a critical component of data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union, which mandates that organizations must respond to such requests within specific timeframes, typically 30 days.

Why It Matters:

Having a mechanism to respond to DSARs within the required timeframes is essential for compliance with data protection laws. It ensures that individuals can exercise their right to access their personal data, promoting transparency and trust. Failure to respond timely can result in significant fines and reputational damage. Additionally, a well-defined process helps protect sensitive information by ensuring that only authorized requests are fulfilled, thereby maintaining data integrity and security.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, an organization might provide documentation of their DSAR handling procedure. This could include a step-by-step guide on how requests are received, verified, processed, and responded to within the mandated timeframe. Additionally, logs or records of past DSARs, showing timely responses, would serve as practical evidence of the mechanism's effectiveness.

Example 1

We utilize a dedicated module within our customer relationship management (CRM) system to log and manage data subject access requests (DSARs). Upon receiving a DSAR, our privacy officer reviews the request to verify the identity of the data subject and the legitimacy of the request. Once verified, our team retrieves the relevant data from our PaaS provider and responds to the data subject within the required timeframe, typically within 15 business days.

Example 2

Our organization has implemented a comprehensive DSAR management system integrated with our AWS infrastructure. This system automates the logging, verification, and processing of DSARs. Our dedicated data protection team monitors the system to ensure all requests are responded to within the mandated 30-day period, with an average response time of 20 days.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and does not collect or store personal data, data subject access requests (DSARs) are not applicable to our operations. However, we maintain a policy to handle any potential DSARs should the need arise, ensuring compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

Question

Do you have a mechanism to delete customer personal data upon verified request?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization has a process in place to remove personal data of customers when they formally request it. Personal data can include names, email addresses, physical addresses, and any other information that can be used to identify an individual. The request must be verified to ensure it is legitimate, meaning you need to confirm the identity of the person making the request to prevent unauthorized deletions.

Why It Matters:

Having a mechanism to delete personal data upon request is crucial for several reasons. First, it helps build trust with your customers by showing that you respect their privacy and give them control over their data. Second, many data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe, require organizations to provide this capability. Non-compliance can result in significant fines and legal repercussions. Finally, it reduces the risk of data breaches, as less stored data means there is less sensitive information that could be exposed if a breach occurs.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that you have this mechanism in place, you might provide documentation of your data deletion policy, including the steps taken to verify a deletion request and the technical processes used to remove the data from your systems. For instance, you could show logs of deletion requests, confirmation that the data was removed from all databases and backups, and any notifications sent to the customer confirming the deletion.

Example 1

We utilize a dedicated data deletion API endpoint within our Heroku-hosted application to facilitate the removal of customer personal data upon verified request. This process includes identity verification through a secure token sent to the customer's registered email, followed by immediate deletion of the data from our primary database and all associated backups.

Example 2

Our AWS-hosted infrastructure incorporates a comprehensive data deletion workflow that is triggered upon receipt of a verified customer request. This involves automated scripts that remove personal data from our RDS databases, S3 buckets, and any associated Elasticache instances, with logs maintained for audit purposes and confirmation sent to the customer.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and tailored to each client's specific environment, the mechanism for deleting customer personal data varies by installation. However, we provide detailed guidelines and scripts to our clients to ensure they can comply with data deletion requests in accordance with applicable regulations.

Question

If operating outside the EU, have you appointed an Article 27 EU Representative?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization, if it operates outside the European Union (EU), has designated a specific representative within the EU. This requirement is part of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a comprehensive data protection law in the EU. The GDPR mandates that non-EU organizations processing the personal data of EU residents must appoint an EU-based representative. This representative acts as a point of contact for data subjects (individuals whose data is being processed), supervisory authorities, and other relevant bodies within the EU.

Why It Matters and Example of Evidence:

Appointing an Article 27 EU Representative is crucial for ensuring compliance with GDPR, which aims to protect the privacy and personal data of EU citizens. By having a representative within the EU, your organization demonstrates its commitment to adhering to EU data protection laws and provides a clear channel for communication regarding data protection issues.

An example of evidence to demonstrate fulfillment of this requirement would be a formal appointment letter or contract with the EU Representative, detailing their role, responsibilities, and contact information. Additionally, you could provide documentation showing that the representative has been registered with the relevant EU data protection authority. This ensures that there is a clear and accountable point of contact for any GDPR-related inquiries or compliance issues.

Example 1

We have appointed an Article 27 EU Representative to ensure compliance with GDPR requirements. The representative is registered with the relevant EU data protection authority and serves as the point of contact for data subjects and supervisory authorities within the EU.

Example 2

As a growth-stage SaaS company hosted on AWS, we have designated an Article 27 EU Representative to maintain GDPR compliance. This representative is responsible for handling data protection inquiries and ensuring our operations align with EU data protection laws.

Example 3

Our software is exclusively hosted on-premises and does not involve the processing of personal data of EU residents. Therefore, the appointment of an Article 27 EU Representative is not applicable to our organization.

Question

Are personnel who handle personal data trained on their privacy obligations at least annually?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether the individuals within your organization who manage or process personal data receive regular training on their responsibilities to protect that data. Personal data can include any information that can identify an individual, such as names, addresses, or even IP addresses. The question emphasizes the importance of ongoing education to ensure that personnel are aware of the latest privacy laws, company policies, and best practices for handling sensitive information. Regular training helps to mitigate the risk of data breaches caused by human error or negligence.

Why It Matters and Practical Example:

Ensuring that personnel are trained annually on their privacy obligations is crucial because the landscape of data privacy is constantly evolving with new regulations and threats. For example, if an employee is not aware of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements and accidentally sends an email containing personal data to the wrong recipient, it could result in a data breach. Annual training helps refresh their knowledge and keeps them updated on any changes in privacy laws or company policies.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this requirement, an organization might provide documentation such as training schedules, attendance records, and course completion certificates for all personnel who handle personal data. Additionally, they could show a curriculum that covers topics like data encryption, secure data handling practices, and the specific privacy laws relevant to their industry. Regular assessments or quizzes post-training can also serve as evidence that the training was effective and understood by the personnel.

Example 1

All personnel who handle personal data undergo mandatory annual training on privacy obligations. The training covers the latest privacy laws, company policies, and best practices for secure data handling. Attendance is recorded, and completion certificates are issued to ensure compliance.

Example 2

Our organization conducts comprehensive annual training for all employees who process personal data. The training includes modules on GDPR, CCPA, and internal data protection policies. We maintain detailed records of training attendance and assessments to verify understanding and compliance.

Example 3

As our software is entirely on-premises and does not involve the handling of personal data in a cloud environment, the annual training on privacy obligations for personnel is not directly applicable. However, we do provide general data security training to all employees.

Question

Describe your Secure Software Development Lifecycle (SSDLC). How do you ensure code is developed securely?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking you to describe the processes and practices your organization follows to develop software securely. The Secure Software Development Lifecycle (SSDLC) is a framework that integrates security practices into each phase of the software development process. This ensures that security is considered from the initial design through to deployment and maintenance. The question aims to understand how your organization embeds security into its development practices to prevent vulnerabilities and protect against potential threats.

Why It Matters:

Ensuring that code is developed securely is critical because vulnerabilities in software can lead to serious security breaches. By following a SSDLC, organizations can identify and mitigate security risks early in the development process, which is more efficient and cost-effective than addressing them after the software has been deployed. This proactive approach helps protect sensitive data, maintain customer trust, and avoid regulatory penalties. Practical examples of SSDLC practices include conducting threat modeling during the design phase, performing regular code reviews and static analysis, and implementing secure coding standards.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation of your SSDLC policy, which outlines the security practices integrated into each development phase. This could include evidence of training programs for developers on secure coding practices, reports from regular code reviews, and results from static analysis tools used to identify vulnerabilities in the code. Additionally, you might share examples of how security issues were identified and resolved during the development process, showcasing the effectiveness of your SSDLC practices.

Example 1

Our Secure Software Development Lifecycle (SSDLC) integrates security practices at every phase, starting with threat modeling during design. We utilize automated static analysis tools provided by our PaaS platform to scan for vulnerabilities in the codebase, and conduct regular peer code reviews to ensure adherence to secure coding standards.

Example 2

We follow a comprehensive SSDLC that includes dedicated security champions in each development team, conducting threat modeling and attack surface analysis early in the design phase. Our development environment on AWS incorporates automated security testing, including static and dynamic analysis, and we perform regular security code reviews and penetration testing to identify and remediate vulnerabilities before deployment.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and tailored for specific client environments, we focus on secure configuration management and regular security audits rather than a traditional SSDLC. We ensure secure development through rigorous change management processes, secure coding training for developers, and periodic third-party security assessments to validate our security posture.

Question

How do you train developers on secure coding practices?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking about the methods and processes your organization uses to educate developers on secure coding practices. Secure coding practices involve writing code in a way that minimizes security vulnerabilities and protects against common threats like injection attacks, cross-site scripting (XSS), and buffer overflows. By training developers, your organization aims to ensure that security is integrated into the software development lifecycle from the beginning, reducing the risk of introducing vulnerabilities into the codebase.

Why It Matters:

Training developers on secure coding practices is crucial because it helps prevent security flaws that could be exploited by attackers. When developers are aware of common security pitfalls and know how to avoid them, the resulting software is more robust and less likely to be compromised. This training can include workshops, online courses, coding standards documentation, and regular code reviews focused on security. For example, an organization might require developers to complete a certified secure coding course annually and participate in peer reviews where security is a key consideration.

Example of Evidence:

Evidence of fulfilling this question might include documentation of the training programs offered to developers, certificates of completion for secure coding courses, and records of regular secure coding workshops. Additionally, code review checklists that emphasize security considerations and feedback from these reviews can demonstrate that secure coding practices are being integrated into the development process.

Example 1

We utilize online platforms such as Pluralsight and Coursera to provide our developers with access to secure coding courses. Additionally, we conduct bi-monthly workshops led by our security lead to discuss recent threats and best practices in secure coding. We also incorporate security checklists in our code review process to ensure adherence to secure coding standards.

Example 2

Our developers are required to complete an annual secure coding certification from (ISC)² and attend quarterly training sessions conducted by our dedicated security team. We have implemented a mandatory secure coding standard that all code must adhere to, and we perform automated security scans as part of our CI/CD pipeline. Furthermore, we encourage a culture of security awareness through regular hackathons focused on secure coding challenges.

Example 3

As our software is primarily on-premises and tailored to client specifications, we focus more on secure configuration and deployment practices rather than secure coding. However, we do provide our developers with resources and guidelines on secure coding practices relevant to their work, and we conduct periodic reviews to ensure that security considerations are integrated into the development process.

Question

Describe how users authenticate to your application. Do you support MFA and SSO? What SSO protocols are supported (SAML, OIDC)?

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking you to detail the methods your application uses to verify the identity of its users. Authentication is the process of confirming that a user is who they claim to be. The question specifically wants to know if your application supports **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)** and **Single Sign-On (SSO)**. MFA requires users to provide two or more verification factors to gain access, adding an extra layer of security. SSO allows users to authenticate once and gain access to multiple applications without needing to log in again. The question also asks which SSO protocols your application supports, such as **Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML)** or **OpenID Connect (OIDC)**.

Why It Matters:

Understanding how users authenticate to your application is crucial for assessing its security posture. MFA significantly reduces the risk of unauthorized access because even if an attacker obtains a user's password, they would still need additional verification factors. SSO enhances user experience by simplifying the login process while maintaining security through standardized protocols like SAML and OIDC. These protocols ensure that authentication data is securely transmitted and verified across different systems.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation or configuration settings that show your application supports MFA and SSO. For instance, you could show configuration files or screenshots from your authentication system that list supported protocols (SAML, OIDC) and describe the MFA methods available (e.g., SMS codes, authenticator apps). Additionally, you might include logs or reports that show MFA and SSO usage statistics, indicating that these features are actively being used by your users.

Example 1

Users authenticate to our application via email and password. We support Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) through authenticator apps and SMS codes. Our application integrates with Single Sign-On (SSO) providers using the OpenID Connect (OIDC) protocol.

Example 2

Our application utilizes a combination of email/password and SSO for user authentication. We enforce Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) for all users, supporting authenticator apps, SMS, and hardware tokens. We support Single Sign-On (SSO) through both Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML) and OpenID Connect (OIDC) protocols, enabling seamless integration with various identity providers.

Example 3

Our software is deployed on-premises and does not require user authentication through external services. Therefore, Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) and Single Sign-On (SSO) are not applicable in this context. Users access the application using local credentials managed by the organization.

Question

Does your application support role-based access control (RBAC) with granular, customizable permissions?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your application has a system in place that allows you to assign specific roles to users, where each role has a unique set of permissions. Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) is a method of restricting system access to authorized users. Instead of giving every user the same level of access, RBAC allows you to define roles with specific permissions and assign these roles to users based on their job functions or responsibilities. Granular, customizable permissions mean that these roles can be finely tuned to allow or deny specific actions within the application.

Why It Matters:

Implementing RBAC with granular permissions is crucial for maintaining the security and integrity of your application. It ensures that users only have access to the resources and functionalities they need to perform their jobs, reducing the risk of unauthorized access or accidental data breaches. For example, an admin role might have permissions to manage user accounts and system settings, while a regular user role might only have permissions to view certain data or perform specific tasks.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that your application supports RBAC with granular, customizable permissions, you might provide documentation or configuration files that show the defined roles and their associated permissions. Additionally, you could offer screenshots of the application's user interface where roles are assigned and permissions are managed. Logs or audit trails that show how these permissions are enforced in the application can also serve as evidence.

Example 1

Our application, hosted on Heroku, supports role-based access control (RBAC) with granular, customizable permissions. We have defined roles such as 'Admin', 'Editor', and 'Viewer', each with specific permissions tailored to their responsibilities. These roles are managed through our application's settings, ensuring that users only have access to the features and data necessary for their job functions.

Example 2

Our AWS-hosted application features a robust RBAC system with highly granular, customizable permissions. We utilize AWS IAM roles in conjunction with our application's internal role management to ensure that each user has the precise level of access required. This setup allows us to maintain a high level of security while enabling efficient team collaboration.

Example 3

Our on-premises software does not utilize role-based access control (RBAC) as it is designed for single-user operation. However, we ensure data security through other means, such as encrypted storage and regular security audits. The concept of RBAC is not applicable in this context due to the nature of our product.

Question

How does your application store and protect API keys?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking about the methods and measures your organization uses to store and safeguard API keys within your application. API keys are unique identifiers used to authenticate and authorize requests to an API. They are critical for ensuring that only legitimate users and applications can access API services. Improper storage and protection of API keys can lead to unauthorized access, data breaches, and other security incidents.

Why It Matters:

Understanding how API keys are stored and protected is essential because these keys often grant significant access to sensitive data and functionality. If an attacker gains access to an API key, they can potentially perform actions on behalf of the legitimate user or application, leading to data theft, service disruption, or other malicious activities. Therefore, it's crucial to employ strong security practices to ensure that API keys are stored securely and are not exposed to unauthorized entities.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation or configurations showing that API keys are stored in a secure, encrypted vault rather than being hard-coded into the application. For instance, you could show that your organization uses a secrets management service like AWS Secrets Manager, Azure Key Vault, or HashiCorp Vault to store and retrieve API keys. Additionally, you might provide evidence of access controls and logging mechanisms in place to monitor and restrict who can access these keys.

Example 1

Our application stores API keys in Heroku's Config Vars, which are encrypted at rest and not exposed in the application code. Access to Heroku's dashboard is restricted to authorized team members via two-factor authentication.

Example 2

API keys are stored in AWS Secrets Manager, which provides automatic rotation and encryption using AWS KMS. Access to these secrets is tightly controlled via IAM policies, ensuring only necessary services and personnel can retrieve them.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and does not utilize cloud-based APIs, the storage and protection of API keys is not applicable to our environment. However, we ensure that any sensitive information is stored securely using industry-standard encryption practices.

Question

What audit trails and logs are available for customer review? (user activity, admin actions, data access)

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking about the records and logs that your organization maintains, which can be reviewed by customers. Specifically, it wants to know what kind of audit trails and logs are available. These logs typically include details about user activity, administrative actions, and data access. The purpose of these logs is to provide a clear, traceable record of who did what, when, and on what data. This is crucial for maintaining accountability, ensuring compliance with regulations, and investigating any suspicious activities.

Why It Matters:

Having detailed audit trails and logs is essential for several reasons. First, it helps in maintaining transparency with customers by showing them exactly what actions have been taken within their accounts. Second, it aids in compliance with various regulations that require detailed logging of user activities and data access. Finally, in the event of a security incident, these logs are invaluable for forensic analysis to determine the cause and scope of the incident.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation or a configuration report that details the types of logs collected, such as user login attempts, file access records, and administrative changes. You could also offer access to a log management system where these records are stored and reviewed. For instance, showing that your system logs every time a user accesses sensitive data, along with timestamps and user identifiers, would be a strong example of meeting this requirement.

Example 1

We utilize Heroku's built-in logging features to maintain audit trails for user activity, admin actions, and data access. These logs are accessible via the Heroku Dashboard and can be streamed to third-party log management services for further analysis and customer review.

Example 2

Our AWS environment is configured to capture detailed audit trails and logs for user activity, admin actions, and data access. These logs are stored in Amazon CloudWatch and are available for customer review through our customer portal, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises and does not involve cloud-based user activity logging, the question regarding audit trails and logs for customer review is not directly applicable. However, we maintain comprehensive on-site logs for all administrative actions and data access, which are available for internal audit and compliance purposes.

Question

Can customers choose the geographic region where their data is stored?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization allows customers to select the specific geographic location where their data will be stored. This is important because different regions have different laws and regulations regarding data storage and privacy. For example, the European Union has stringent data protection laws under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which require that personal data of EU citizens be stored and processed in compliance with these regulations.

Why It Matters:

Giving customers the option to choose the geographic region for data storage enhances their control over their data and helps them meet legal requirements. It also addresses concerns about data sovereignty, where countries have laws that require data about their citizens to be stored within their borders. For instance, a customer in Germany might want their data stored in the EU to ensure compliance with GDPR. Additionally, some customers may have performance requirements that necessitate data being stored closer to their physical location to reduce latency.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate that customers can choose the geographic region for data storage, you might provide documentation or configuration settings from your data storage solution that show the available regions and how customers can select them. For example, cloud service providers like AWS, Azure, or Google Cloud offer dashboards where customers can specify the region for their data storage. You could also include customer testimonials or case studies where customers have successfully chosen and utilized specific regions for their data storage needs.

Example 1

Our platform, hosted on Heroku, allows customers to choose the geographic region for their data storage. Customers can select from a predefined list of regions available on Heroku's platform, ensuring their data is stored in compliance with local regulations and performance needs.

Example 2

Our platform, hosted on AWS, provides customers with the flexibility to choose the geographic region where their data is stored. Through our custom dashboard, customers can select from multiple AWS regions globally, enabling them to comply with regional data sovereignty laws and optimize performance based on their location.

Example 3

Our on-premises software solution does not offer the option for customers to choose the geographic region for data storage, as all data is stored within our secure data centers. However, we ensure compliance with local data protection laws through stringent security measures and regular audits.

Question

Can customers export their data? In what format, and is there a self-service mechanism?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether users of your service have the ability to export their own data. It wants to know the formats in which this data can be exported and if there is an automated, self-service way for users to do this without needing to contact support or another department.

Why It Matters:

Allowing users to export their data is crucial for data portability and user trust. It ensures that users can take their data with them if they decide to switch services. Providing multiple formats (like CSV, JSON, or XML) caters to different user needs, whether they need simple spreadsheets or more complex data structures. A self-service mechanism enhances user convenience and reduces the burden on your support team.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide documentation or links to user interface elements that show how users can export their data. For instance, you could show screenshots of a settings page where users can select their data and choose an export format. Additionally, logging data that shows users have successfully exported their data via the self-service option would serve as practical evidence.

Example 1

Customers can export their data through our platform's user interface. The available formats for export are CSV and JSON. This process is fully automated and does not require any interaction with our support team.

Example 2

Our platform allows customers to export their data in multiple formats including CSV, JSON, and XML. We provide a self-service mechanism within the user dashboard where customers can initiate the export process with a few clicks. This feature is designed to ensure data portability and reduce the need for manual support requests.

Example 3

As our software is deployed on-premises, the concept of data residency and portability through a self-service mechanism is not directly applicable. However, we offer comprehensive data export services upon customer request, ensuring that data can be provided in formats such as CSV or JSON as needed.

Question

Do you engage in onward transfers of data outside the EEA? If so, under what legal mechanisms?

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking whether your organization transfers personal data outside the European Economic Area (EEA) to another country. The EEA includes EU member states plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway. If your organization does transfer data outside the EEA, the question requires you to specify the legal mechanisms that ensure such transfers comply with data protection regulations.

Why It Matters:

Ensuring that data transfers outside the EEA are conducted under appropriate legal mechanisms is essential for maintaining compliance with regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Without proper mechanisms, your organization could face significant legal and financial penalties. Additionally, it helps protect the privacy and rights of individuals whose data is being transferred. Common legal mechanisms include Standard Contractual Clauses (SCCs), Binding Corporate Rules (BCRs), or relying on adequacy decisions where the recipient country has been deemed to provide an adequate level of data protection.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate compliance with this question, you might provide documentation such as executed Standard Contractual Clauses between your organization and the data recipient, or evidence of Binding Corporate Rules if applicable. Another example could be a report or certification showing that the recipient country has been deemed adequate by the European Commission. This evidence should clearly show the legal basis for the data transfer and any measures taken to ensure data protection compliance.

Example 1

We do not engage in onward transfers of data outside the EEA. Our data is hosted on a PaaS provider based within the EEA, ensuring all data remains within compliant jurisdictions.

Example 2

We engage in onward transfers of data outside the EEA for certain services hosted on AWS. These transfers are conducted under the Standard Contractual Clauses (SCCs) approved by the European Commission to ensure compliance with GDPR requirements.

Example 3

As our software is exclusively on-premises and data does not leave the physical location of our servers within the EEA, the question regarding onward transfers of data outside the EEA is not relevant to our operations.

Question

Does your product or service use AI or machine learning? If so, describe the AI capabilities and how they are used.

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether your product or service incorporates artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning (ML) technologies. AI refers to systems that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as understanding natural language or recognizing patterns. Machine learning is a subset of AI where systems learn from data, identify patterns, and make decisions with minimal human intervention. The question seeks to understand the specific AI capabilities your product uses and how these capabilities are applied within your service.

Why It Matters:

Understanding whether and how your product uses AI or ML helps assess the security posture of your product. AI and ML systems often require large amounts of data to function effectively, which can include sensitive or personal information. This data must be protected against unauthorized access and breaches. Additionally, the algorithms used in AI can be complex and may contain vulnerabilities that could be exploited. Describing the AI capabilities and their use cases allows security assessors to evaluate potential risks and ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a detailed description of the AI components within your product. For instance, you could explain that your product uses a machine learning model to predict user behavior based on historical data. You would then describe how this model is trained, the type of data it uses, and the measures taken to secure this data. Additionally, you might include information on how the model is monitored for performance and security, such as regular audits and updates to the algorithm to address new threats.

Example 1

Our product utilizes a machine learning model hosted on Heroku to analyze user behavior and provide personalized recommendations. The model is trained on anonymized user interaction data, and we ensure data security through Heroku's built-in encryption and access controls.

Example 2

Our SaaS platform employs advanced AI capabilities, including natural language processing and predictive analytics, hosted on AWS. These AI components are integral to our customer support automation and trend forecasting features. We secure these AI systems through AWS's comprehensive security services, regular model audits, and adherence to industry best practices for data privacy and algorithm transparency.

Example 3

Our product is a traditional on-premises software solution that does not incorporate AI or machine learning capabilities. Therefore, the question regarding AI usage is not applicable to our service.

Question

Is customer data used to train AI/ML models? If so, is this opt-in or opt-out, and can customers prohibit use of their data for training?

Explainer

Explanation of the Question:

This question is asking whether the organization uses customer data to train artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning (ML) models. AI/ML models often require large datasets to learn and improve their performance. Customer data can be a valuable resource for this purpose, but it raises significant privacy and ethical concerns. The question also inquires about the consent mechanism in place—whether it is opt-in (customers must explicitly agree) or opt-out (customers must explicitly decline)—and whether customers have the ability to prohibit the use of their data for training these models altogether.

Why It Matters:

Understanding how customer data is used in AI/ML training is crucial for several reasons. First, it ensures transparency with customers about how their data is being utilized. Second, it helps maintain customer trust, which is vital for long-term relationships. Third, it ensures compliance with data protection regulations, such as GDPR, which require explicit consent for data usage, especially for sensitive applications like AI/ML. Finally, allowing customers to opt-out provides them with control over their data, enhancing their privacy and reducing the risk of data misuse.

Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, an organization might provide documentation of their data usage policies, consent forms used during data collection, and mechanisms for customers to opt-in or opt-out. For instance, they could show a clause in their terms of service that outlines the use of data for AI/ML training, along with screenshots of the opt-in/opt-out options presented to customers during the data collection process. Additionally, they might provide logs or records showing how customer requests to prohibit data use are handled and enforced within their systems.

Example 1

Customer data is not used to train AI/ML models. Our current infrastructure on Heroku focuses solely on delivering our SaaS product, and we do not collect or utilize customer data for any AI/ML initiatives.

Example 2

Customer data is used to train our AI/ML models with an opt-in mechanism. Customers can explicitly choose to allow their data to be used for training purposes through a clear consent form during account setup. Additionally, customers have the option to prohibit the use of their data for training at any time via their account settings.

Example 3

Our software is deployed on-premises and does not involve the collection or use of customer data for AI/ML training. Therefore, the question regarding opt-in or opt-out mechanisms is not applicable to our current operational model.

Question

Which third-party AI providers do you use? (e.g., OpenAI, Anthropic, AWS Bedrock, Azure OpenAI) Describe where customer data is sent and how it is processed.

Explainer

Understanding the Question:

This question is asking you to identify any third-party AI providers your organization uses. Examples include well-known services like OpenAI, Anthropic, AWS Bedrock, and Azure OpenAI. The question also wants you to explain the flow of customer data when it is sent to these providers and detail how that data is processed. This is important because it helps assess the security and privacy risks associated with using external AI services.
Why It Matters:

Understanding which third-party AI providers you use and how customer data is managed is crucial for several reasons. First, it helps you ensure that sensitive data is protected according to your organization's security policies and any relevant regulations, such as GDPR or HIPAA. Second, it allows you to evaluate the security practices of these third-party providers to ensure they meet your standards. For example, if you use OpenAI, you should know how data is encrypted, who has access to it, and how long it is retained.
Example of Evidence:

To demonstrate fulfillment of this question, you might provide a document that lists all third-party AI providers your organization uses. For each provider, include details on:
- The specific services used (e.g., GPT-3 for text generation)
- How customer data is transmitted to the provider (e.g., via API calls)
- Data processing details, including encryption methods, data storage locations, and data retention policies
- Any contractual agreements or security assurances provided by the third-party provider

This documentation should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect any changes in your use of third-party AI services.

Example 1

Our organization uses Vercel for hosting and Anthropic for AI-driven text analysis. Customer data is sent to Anthropic via secure API calls, where it is processed in their cloud environment. Data is encrypted both in transit and at rest, and it is retained for a maximum of 30 days as per our data retention policy.

Example 2

We utilize AWS Bedrock for our AI needs, specifically for natural language processing and machine learning model deployment. Customer data is transmitted to AWS through encrypted API calls and processed within their secure cloud infrastructure. Data is stored in AWS S3 buckets with server-side encryption, and access is restricted to authorized personnel only. We have a comprehensive data processing agreement with AWS to ensure compliance with GDPR and other relevant regulations.

Example 3

Our software is entirely on-premises, and we do not use any third-party AI providers. Therefore, the question about sending customer data to external AI services is not applicable to our organization. All data processing occurs within our secure, internal network, and we maintain full control over data handling and security practices.