



Subject: Security Polices: Keep them Simple, Make them Stick

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Dear Real Estate Executive:

You've seen it on the news. A company announces the loss of sensitive customer information. These failures not only affect the profitability of an organization, they can damage customer confidence – sometimes permanently. In order to be successful, your information security effort needs to have a set of policies, which provides clear instructions for every member of your organization. Policies are the primary building blocks and serve as a foundation of information security within your office.

**Set the Tone** – Policies sensitize agents, executives and staff to the potential problems associated with the computers, PDAs, other systems and applications (like Microsoft Windows) that are used everyday. They also set the strategic and tactical direction for how information security is practiced in your organization. Policies provide the most important and most frequently referenced source of instructions detailing how you should protect both information and information systems.

**Keep it Simple** – One common mistake that organizations make is that they document too many policies or that they make them too complicated. Every real estate organization should have a core set of security policies. The simpler they are, the more likely they are to be adopted, followed and remembered. They should be clear, sufficient and responsive to your enterprise. In their simplicity, they must be tailored to your specific needs and business operations. Again, the more aligned those policies are with the mechanics and requirements of your business, the more likely they will be adopted and remembered, and practiced. Finally, they need to be revisited periodically to ensure that they reflect your business operations and IT environment.

**Safeguard Your Business** – From an executive management perspective, information security policies are also important reference documents for internal audits and for the resolution of legal disputes about due diligence. Case law indicates that policy documents can act as a clear statement of management's

intent, and thereby help reduce management's potential liability. Policy statements can also serve as evidence of management's intention to safeguard information; this is an essential but often neglected step in the legal assertion of information protection. A policy document can also serve as evidence of internal quality control processes.

Make a commitment to document a core set of information security policies for your organization by the end of 2006. This step alone will make an important statement to your employees, customers and business partners.

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REALTOR® Secure program resources  
<http://www.realtor.org/crtsecure.nsf/pages/resources?OpenDocument>

Sample policy templates  
<http://www.sans.org/resources/policies/#template>

Five steps to security policy compliance  
<http://www.baselinesoft.com/papers/5StepsToPolicyCompliance.pdf>

White papers on information security policies  
[http://www.securitydocs.com/Security\\_Policies/Sample\\_Policies](http://www.securitydocs.com/Security_Policies/Sample_Policies)

Research and whitepapers on information security policies  
<http://www.baselinesoft.com/whitepapers.html>

Policy development guide  
[http://www.sans.org/reading\\_room/whitepapers/policyissues/](http://www.sans.org/reading_room/whitepapers/policyissues/)