



Magnet Forensics founder and CTO, Jad Saliba, and CEO, Adam Belsher. SUPPLIED

The Canadian advantage: Leading cybersecurity firms protect Canada's own backyard

Canadian companies provide homegrown solutions to tackle growing cyber threats

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Cybercrime exploded during the pandemic. As companies pivoted and sent many of their employees to work from home, their defence systems weakened. Suddenly, their remote-working staff were more open to attacks, away from the cyber protection technologies they had enjoyed at the office.

And the fallout was immediate. Since March 2020, Canadian organizations have been inundated with cyberattacks, with 85.7 per cent of companies experiencing at least one attack in 2021, up from 78 per cent in 2020, according to the Cyberthreat Defense Report. The vast majority of these attacks were ransomware attacks, leading to downtime and millions in payouts.

"In the first-half of last year alone, we saw that global ransomware attacks more than doubled," says Adam Belsher, CEO of Magnet Forensics, a Waterloo, Ont.-based digital forensics solutions provider.

In response to these attacks, the Canadian cybersecurity landscape has shifted. More companies are increasing their IT budgets and spending more on protecting their biggest assets: the sensitive data of customers, their day-to-day operations and their reputations. Cybersecurity spending in both the public and private sector is expected to exceed \$172.5 billion worldwide, according to Gartner Research.

As tech propels more digital innovation in the workplace, particularly in the sectors of health care, education, manufacturing and financial services, more vulnerabilities emerge that need to be addressed. And Canadian cybersecurity firms that can

deliver unique solutions are in demand.

The message is getting through, says Belsher. "In the past, most of this spending would have gone toward preventative measures but we've started to see a shift in how enterprises think of cybersecurity. They now understand that cyberattacks aren't a possibility — they're an inevitability," he says.

Erin McLean, chief marketing officer at eSentire, a Waterloo-based cybersecurity firm, agrees. "Canadian organizations through the pandemic realized the need to better secure the digital revolution that they're on and to make sure that they are partnering with third-party experts to do that," she says.

The Canadian advantage

Approximately 25 per cent of Canadian employees are still working from home, according to Statistics Canada, and that's likely to continue. That means an ongoing need on the part of organizations to protect employees while they're working remotely.

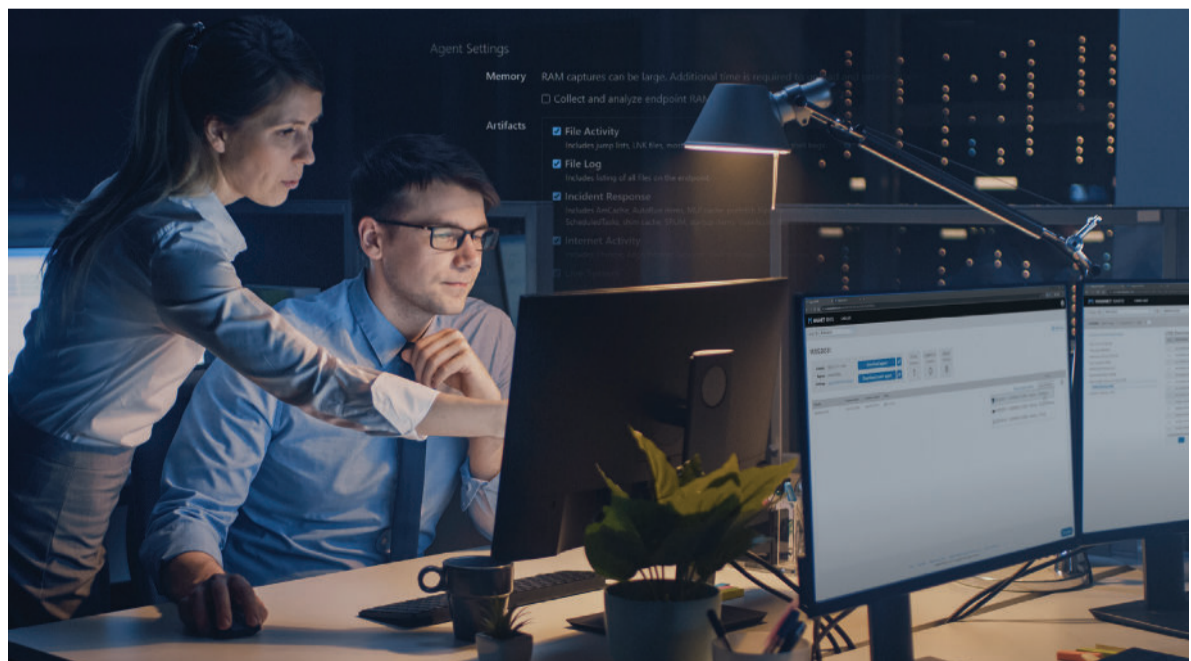
"They have to adjust their strategies to place equal emphasis on individual employees, who are more exposed at home because they're using their own devices and more third-party apps," explains Belsher.

His firm, Magnet Forensics, helps enterprises perform scans of their employees' work devices for malicious activity, identifying threats and conducting a full forensic analysis. Conversely, eSentire, which works with 1,500 organizations worldwide, employs its Managed Detection and Response to offer firms a complete picture of where organizations may face attacks and identifies, hunts and shuts down cyberattacks as they occur.

McLean says there is a lot of global concern around data privacy, data regulation, connectivity and political strife. She says organizations need to ask themselves what provider is going to be able to ensure their overall protection, given the region that they're based in or given any political affiliation that they may have.



eSentire's SOC cyber analysts huddle about a new variant of ransomware that was caught trying to infect a customer. PHOTO BY GABRIEL RAMOS/ESENTIRE



Magnet Forensics helps enterprises perform scans of their employees' work devices for malicious activity. SUPPLIED

"With geopolitical tensions, I think it's really important that Canadian businesses choose a provider that has all of that contextual awareness, has the talents and the capabilities from a people perspective to support them locally," she says.

Belsher feels that there are also economic and security benefits to relying on Canadian businesses to provide cybersecurity services. "Aside from reaching our economic potential, we should also consider our sovereignty," he

says. "Canadian cybersecurity firms are accountable to Canadian citizens and there is an extra responsibility for us to keep them safe and uphold Canadian values and laws," he says.

Plus, he points out, Canada's cybersecurity industry is made up of some of the brightest talents in the world. These talents are part of the large tech hub that exists in Waterloo, where there are over 100 companies working in cybersecurity, encryption, threat detection,

digital forensics and quantum cryptography.

McLean feels that all of these providers working in close proximity are leading to more tech innovation and partnership.

"I think that having so many cybersecurity providers coming from the Waterloo area pushes us to make sure that we are protecting our own backyard," says McLean. "Being Canadian, we all want to succeed together," she says.