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Technology

Bosses Beware: March Madness Could Mean Lost Productivity

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If you're among those who get very into the March Madness college basketball tournament, you're also among those bosses have to worry about the next few weeks. And as Tech Beat reporter Adam Balkin explains, the internet may be partially to blame.

It beats out even the Super Bowl as the most wagered-upon sporting event within U.S. offices: March Madness, the NCAA basketball tournament. It's believed one-third of us who head to an office everyday will dive head first into the annual office pool, regardless of how much we know about the sport.

But computer security experts warn, if you're not careful about how you keep track of your winnings, you could easily be losing a lot more.

"Any time you have an activity like that that draws such a major audience, it's just an opportunity for hackers to get in there and take advantage of the situation," says John Papaioannou of PROMENET, Inc. "There are ploys where they send an email, you hook on to the email and you click on an icon and rather than taking you to a legitimate server data base, it takes you to a database that's not legitimate where they're just going to take your information, your password, your user information."

The other thing you have to keep your eye on, or your boss has to look out for, is a drop in productivity. Nielsen Net Ratings says last year at this time more people, a lot more people, visited March Madness websites at work as opposed to at home.

A big reason: the opening rounds take place during the work week, starting at noon, right in the middle of the work day. Researchers have over the past few years put the amount businesses lose in productivity anywhere between one and four billion dollars. And this year, it's expected to be on

the higher end since for a second straight year, CBS SportsLine will offer live video streams of games online for free, which eats up worker time and valuable internet bandwidth.

“A new feature for this season is that the screen is actually bigger, so there's more chance of you actually getting caught by your boss, but you get to see it,” says Dennis Velasco of About.com. “It's almost like you're watching it on television. Another feature is they actually have radio broadcast.”

And businesses themselves may have to share blame for lost time to all those sites. According to a study from Challenger, Gray & Christmas, an international outsourcing placement agency, just about six percent of businesses plan to block tournament-related websites.

– *Adam Balkin*

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