



NEWSLETTER

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1701 Golf Road
Suite T3-300
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008



(847) 303-1194



www.rj2t.com

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Cybersecurity Lessons from 2025: What Businesses Need to Know Going into the New Year

As 2025 wraps up, all businesses, including small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs), are reflecting on a year marked by rapid digital transformation - and an equally fast-evolving threat landscape. From ransomware attacks to phishing scams and supply chain vulnerabilities, cybersecurity has become a top priority for organizations of all sizes.

Stakes are especially high for SMBs. With limited resources and lean IT teams, many businesses find themselves vulnerable to threats that can disrupt operations, damage reputations, and lead to costly recovery efforts. The good news? 2025 has provided valuable lessons that can help businesses strengthen their defenses heading into 2026.

The Cyber Threats That Defined 2025

This year there was a surge in cyberattacks targeting SMBs, particularly in industries like healthcare, manufacturing, and professional services—sectors that are prevalent throughout Chicagoland. Attackers increasingly used AI-driven phishing campaigns, exploiting human error and outdated systems to gain access to sensitive data.

One of the most concerning trends was the rise in ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) platforms, which allowed even low-skilled cybercriminals to launch sophisticated attacks. These platforms made it easier than ever for bad actors to target businesses with limited cybersecurity infrastructure.

Additionally, supply chain attacks became more common, with hackers infiltrating trusted vendors to reach their clients. This highlighted the importance of vetting third-party providers and implementing robust vendor risk management practices.



Top Cybersecurity Lessons for SMBs

1 Employee Training is Non-Negotiable

Human error remains the leading cause of data breaches. In 2025, phishing emails became more convincing, often mimicking trusted contacts or vendors. SMBs that invested in regular cybersecurity awareness training saw a significant drop in successful phishing attempts.

Action tip: Implement quarterly training sessions and phishing simulations to keep employees alert and informed.

2 Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) Is Essential

MFA has proven to be one of the most effective defenses against unauthorized access. Businesses that adopted MFA across email, cloud platforms, and remote access tools reported fewer incidents of credential theft.

Action tip: Require MFA for all users, especially those accessing sensitive data or systems remotely.

3 Partnering with an MSP Enhances Security Posture

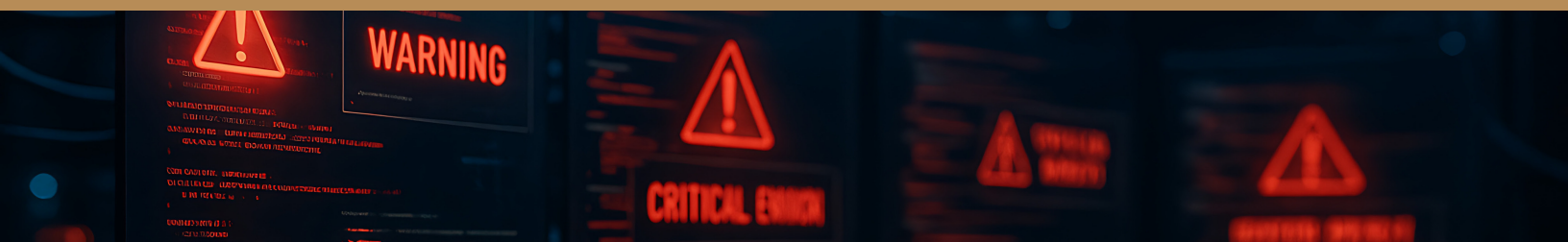
Many SMBs lack the internal resources to manage cybersecurity effectively. Managed Service Providers (MSPs) offer 24/7 monitoring, threat detection, patch management, and strategic guidance—helping businesses stay ahead of threats.

Action Tip: Consider a cybersecurity assessment from a trusted MSP to identify vulnerabilities and prioritize improvements.

4 Backups and Disaster Recovery Plans Are Lifesavers

Companies with reliable, offsite backups and tested recovery plans were able to restore operations quickly after an attack. Those without such measures faced prolonged downtime and data loss.

Action tip: Review your backup strategy. Ensure backups are automated, encrypted, and tested regularly.



Preparing for 2026: What's Next?

Looking ahead, cybersecurity will only become more complex. Here are a few trends SMBs should prepare for:

- **AI-Powered Threats:** Cybercriminals are using AI to craft more convincing phishing emails and automate attacks. Businesses must respond with AI-driven defenses and smarter detection tools.
- **Zero-Trust Architecture:** The traditional perimeter-based security model is fading. Zero Trust—where every user and device is verified before access—is becoming the new standard.
- **Regulatory Pressure:** Expect stricter compliance requirements, especially for businesses handling customer data. Staying ahead of regulations like HIPAA, PCI-DSS, and emerging state-level laws will be critical.
- **Cloud Security Focus:** As more SMBs migrate to cloud platforms, securing cloud environments will be a top priority. Misconfigured settings and weak access controls are common vulnerabilities.



Building Resilience for the Year Ahead

Cybersecurity is no longer optional—it's a business imperative. For SMBs in Chicagoland, the lessons of 2025 are clear: proactive planning, employee education, and strategic partnerships are key to staying secure and resilient.

As you plan for 2026, take time to assess your current security posture. Are your systems protected? Are your employees trained? Do you have a recovery plan in place? If not, now is the time to act.

Contact RJ2 Technologies at (847)303-1194 or email marketing@rj2t.com to get started on your cybersecurity plan for 2026.

Vendor Partner Highlight -



This month we are excited to highlight Nodeware, an advanced vulnerability management platform designed to keep your business secure without disrupting operations. Nodeware leverages AI-driven technology to deliver continuous, non-intrusive scanning of your internal and external assets, ensuring that vulnerabilities are identified and addressed before they become threats.

RJ2 Technologies is happy to be partnered with Nodeware to secure our customers with continuous protection against cyber threats, that is non-disruptive and have real-time protection capabilities. This partnership allows us to enhance our cybersecurity measures, ensuring our clients benefit from robust, continuous protection against potential threats.

To learn more about this partnership please call RJ2 Technologies at (847)-303-1194 or email marketing@rj2t.com.

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Hybrid Work in 2026: Tools and Policies That Actually Work

Hybrid work isn't just a pandemic-era trend—it's now a permanent fixture in how small and mid-sized businesses operate. As we enter 2026, Chicagoland SMBs are refining their hybrid strategies to balance flexibility, productivity, and security.

Whether your team is fully remote, office-based, or somewhere in between, the right tools and policies can make hybrid work seamless and sustainable.

Why Hybrid Work Still Matters

Employees value flexibility, and businesses benefit from reduced overhead and access to a broader talent pool. But hybrid work also introduces challenges: communication gaps, inconsistent workflows, and security risks.

To succeed, SMBs need a hybrid model that's intentional—not improvised.

Essential Tools for Hybrid Success

1. Microsoft Teams - Teams remains a cornerstone for collaboration. With chat, video meetings, file sharing, and app integrations, it keeps remote and in-office employees connected.

Tip: Use Teams channels to organize projects and departments. Encourage asynchronous communication to reduce meeting fatigue.

2. SharePoint & OneDrive - These tools make document management easy. SharePoint is ideal for team sites and shared resources, while OneDrive supports individual file storage with seamless syncing.

Tip: Set clear folder structures and permissions to avoid confusion and data sprawl.

3. VPN & Endpoint Protection - Security is critical. Remote workers need secure access to company resources, and devices must be protected from threats.

Tip: Work with your MSP to deploy VPNs, antivirus software, and device monitoring tools.

4. Time Tracking & Productivity Tools - Apps like Toggl, Clockify, or Microsoft Viva Insights help teams manage time and stay focused.

Tip: Use these tools to support—not micromanage—your team. Focus on outcomes, not hours.



Policies That Support Hybrid Work

- 1. Clear Expectations** - Define work hours, response times, and meeting etiquette. Hybrid work thrives when everyone knows what's expected.
- 2. Security Guidelines** - Establish rules for device use, password hygiene, and data handling. Make cybersecurity training part of onboarding and ongoing education.
- 3. Performance Metrics** - Shift from time-based tracking to goal-based performance. Use KPIs and regular check-ins to measure progress.
- 4. Inclusion & Engagement** - Remote workers can feel disconnected. Schedule virtual team-building activities and ensure remote voices are heard in meetings.

Looking Ahead

Hybrid work will continue to evolve. SMBs that invest in the right tools and create thoughtful policies will attract top talent, improve retention, and stay competitive.

If your business hasn't revisited its hybrid strategy recently, now is the time. **Call RJ2 Technologies at (847) 303-1194 or email marketing@rj2t.com to help assess your current setup and recommend upgrades to support secure, productive hybrid work in 2026.**

Top Microsoft 365 Features You're Probably Not Using

Microsoft 365 is a powerful platform, but many small and mid-sized businesses only use the basics—Word, Excel, Outlook, and maybe Teams. If that sounds familiar, you might be missing out on features that can boost productivity, streamline workflows, and improve security. Here are some underrated Microsoft 365 tools and features that SMBs should start using in 2026:

- 1. Microsoft Loop** - Loop is a new collaboration tool that lets teams work on shared components—like lists, tables, and notes—across apps in real time. You can embed a Loop component in Teams or Outlook, and everyone can edit it simultaneously.
Why it matters: It's perfect for brainstorming, meeting notes, and project planning without switching platforms.
- 2. Viva Insights** - Viva Insights helps employees manage their time and well-being. It offers personalized recommendations based on work habits—like scheduling focus time or taking breaks.
Why it matters: It supports healthier work routines, especially in hybrid environments.
- 3. Power Automate** - This tool lets you automate repetitive tasks—like sending reminders, updating spreadsheets, or syncing data between apps.
Why it matters: Automation saves time and reduces manual errors. Even non-technical users can build simple workflows.
- 4. Microsoft Forms** - Need to collect feedback or run surveys? Microsoft Forms makes it easy to build and share forms with internal teams or external clients.
Why it matters: It's a user-friendly alternative to third-party survey tools and integrates seamlessly with other Microsoft apps.

Getting More from Microsoft 365

If you're already paying for Microsoft 365, make sure you're getting full value. Many of these features are included in standard business plans—you just need to activate and configure them. Unlocking these features can lead to better collaboration, stronger security, and more efficient operations—without adding new software or costs. **Call RJ2 Technologies at (847) 303-1194 or email marketing@rj2t.com for more information.**