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Incident Response Plan Template

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Contents

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1. Introduction:

1.1 Purpose:

The purpose of this Incident Response Plan is to provide a structured and coordinated approach for responding to cybersecurity incidents or breaches within [Your Organization's Name]. The plan outlines the steps and procedures that need to be followed by employees, contractors, and third-party service providers in the event of a security incident. The primary objectives of this plan are to minimize the impact of incidents, protect organizational assets, and facilitate the swift recovery of operations.

1.2 Scope:

This plan applies to all individuals who have access to or are responsible for the security of [Your Organization's Name] systems and data, including employees, contractors, and third-party service providers. It encompasses all systems, networks, applications, and information assets owned or managed by the organization. The plan also covers incidents that may occur within physical premises, remote locations, or cloud environments where [Your Organization's Name] assets are hosted or accessed.

1.3 Objectives:

The incident response plan aims to achieve the following objectives:

1.3.1 Minimize Impact:

The plan focuses on mitigating the impact of security incidents by promptly identifying, containing, and eradicating threats. It aims to prevent the escalation of incidents, minimize disruptions to business operations, and reduce potential financial, reputational, and operational damages.

1.3.2 Protect Organizational Assets:

The plan emphasizes safeguarding critical organizational assets, including systems, networks, applications, and sensitive data. It defines procedures for isolating affected systems, preserving evidence for the investigation, and implementing controls to prevent further compromise.

1.3.3 Swift Recovery:

The plan outlines steps for recovering affected systems and restoring normal operations as quickly as possible. It includes procedures for system restoration, data recovery, and resilience measures to ensure business continuity.

1.3.4 Compliance and Legal Requirements:

The plan considers relevant legal and regulatory requirements related to incident response, data protection, privacy, and breach notification obligations. It aims to assist in complying with applicable laws, regulations, and industry standards.

1.3.5 Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement:

Following an incident, the plan promotes a post-incident analysis to identify lessons learned, root causes, and areas for improvement. It facilitates the implementation of corrective actions, updates to policies and procedures, and ongoing enhancements to the organization's incident response capabilities.

By implementing this Incident Response Plan, [Your Organization's Name] aims to enhance its security posture, strengthen incident response capabilities, and minimize the potential impact of cybersecurity incidents.

2. Incident Response Team:

The Incident Response Team (IRT) consists of the following members:

[List team members and their roles].

The IRT coordinates and executes the incident response activities outlined in this plan.

3. Incident Response Process:

3.1. Preparation:

- Define and document incident response procedures, including roles and responsibilities of the Incident Response Team (IRT) members and other stakeholders. Ensure that all personnel are aware of their respective roles and responsibilities.
- Establish and maintain a central repository for incident response documentation, which includes incident response plans, contact lists, incident reporting templates, and other relevant resources.
- Implement security controls and monitoring mechanisms across the organization's systems and networks to detect and respond to security incidents effectively.

- Develop and maintain relationships with external entities, such as law enforcement agencies, incident response service providers, and information-sharing forums, to facilitate coordinated incident response efforts.
- Conduct regular training and awareness programs for employees and stakeholders to ensure they understand the incident response procedures, reporting mechanisms, and individual responsibilities.

3.2. Detection and Analysis:

- Establish procedures to detect and analyze security events and incidents promptly. This may include using security information and event management (SIEM) systems, intrusion detection systems (IDS), antivirus software, and other monitoring tools.
- Define thresholds and indicators of compromise (IoCs) to identify potential security incidents and anomalous activities.
- Upon detection, initiate the incident response process by notifying the designated Incident Response Team (IRT) members and other relevant stakeholders.
- Assess the severity and impact of the incident based on predefined criteria, such as the type of compromise, sensitivity of the affected data, and potential business impact.
- Collect and preserve evidence relevant to the incident for further analysis, potential legal proceedings, or regulatory requirements.
- Perform a detailed analysis of the incident, including root cause identification, the extent of the compromise, and potential impact on systems, data, and operations.

3.3. Containment, Eradication, and Recovery:

- Isolate affected systems, networks, or devices to prevent further damage and limit the scope of the incident.
- Engage the appropriate technical resources to investigate and remediate the incident. This may involve collaborating with internal IT teams, external vendors, or specialized incident response service providers.
- Develop and implement a containment strategy to stop the progression of the incident and prevent further compromise. This may involve patching vulnerabilities, removing malware, or blocking unauthorized access points.
- Eradicate the incident by eliminating the root cause and ensuring that all systems and networks are clean and secure.
- Restore affected systems, applications, and data to a known good state, following established backup and recovery procedures.
- Validate the effectiveness of the containment, eradication, and recovery actions through thorough testing and monitoring before returning the systems to production.

3.4. Post-Incident Activities:

- Conduct a post-incident analysis to review the effectiveness of the incident response efforts, identify lessons learned, and identify areas for improvement.
- Document the incident details, actions taken, and any additional findings during the investigation for future reference and to support any necessary reporting requirements.
- Update incident response documentation, policies, and procedures based on the lessons learned from the incident.
- Communicate with stakeholders, including executive management, legal and compliance teams, and external parties, as necessary. Provide relevant information about the incident, actions taken, and mitigation measures or recommendations.
- Incorporate any necessary corrective actions or improvements identified during the post-incident analysis into the organization's security controls, processes, and training programs.
- Conduct regular audits and evaluations of the incident response process to ensure ongoing effectiveness and alignment with industry best practices.

4.0 Roles and Responsibilities:

4.1. Incident Response Team Roles:

- **Incident Response Team Lead:**

[Responsibilities]

- Incident Handler:

[Responsibilities]

- Forensic Analyst:

[Responsibilities]

- Communication Coordinator:

[Responsibilities]

4.2. Management Roles:

- Executive Sponsor:

[Responsibilities]

- Incident Response Coordinator:

[Responsibilities]

- Legal/Compliance Representative:

[Responsibilities]

5.0 Incident Classification:

5.1 Purpose:

Incident classification is a critical component of the incident response process as it helps prioritize and allocate resources effectively. It allows the Incident Response Team (IRT) to categorize incidents based on their severity, impact, and urgency, ensuring appropriate and consistent response actions.

5.2 Incident Classification Levels:

In this incident response plan, incidents will be classified into the following levels:

5.2.1 Level 1 - Low Severity:

Incidents classified as Level 1 have a low severity level and minimal impact on the organization's operations, systems, or data.

These incidents typically involve minor security events or deviations from normal security practices that do not pose an immediate threat or compromise sensitive information.

Examples of Level 1 incidents may include low-risk phishing attempts, unsuccessful login attempts, or isolated malware detections that are quickly contained and eradicated.

5.2.2 Level 2 - Medium Severity:

Incidents classified as Level 2 have a moderate severity level and may have a noticeable impact on the organization's operations, systems, or data.

These incidents require a more significant response effort to contain, eradicate, and recover from the effects.

Examples of Level 2 incidents may include successful phishing attacks resulting in compromised user accounts, malware infections on a limited number of systems, or unauthorized access to sensitive information with a limited scope.

5.2.3 Level 3 - High Severity:

Incidents classified as Level 3 have a high severity level and a significant impact on the organization's operations, systems, or data.

These incidents require immediate attention and substantial resources to contain, eradicate, and recover from the effects.

Examples of Level 3 incidents may include widespread malware outbreaks, data breaches involving sensitive customer information, or successful intrusion into critical systems.

5.2.4 Level 4 - Critical Severity:

Incidents classified as Level 4 have a critical severity level and pose a severe threat to the organization's operations, systems, or data.

These incidents require an emergency response and the highest level of resources to contain, eradicate, and recover from the effects.

Examples of Level 4 incidents may include large-scale network breaches, sophisticated and targeted attacks, or significant disruption of critical services.

5.3 Incident Response Actions by Classification:

Based on the incident classification, the incident response plan should define specific response actions and escalation procedures for each level.

Incident handlers should be familiar with the appropriate response actions and follow the guidelines for each classification level.

The incident response plan should clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the Incident Response Team (IRT) members and provide instructions on when and how to escalate incidents to higher levels of management or external entities.

By classifying incidents into appropriate levels, the organization can prioritize its response efforts and allocate resources efficiently. Incident classification allows for consistent decision-making, ensures swift response actions, and helps manage incidents effectively.

6.0 Communication Plan:

6.1 Purpose:

Effective communication is essential during an incident response to ensure that stakeholders are promptly informed, accurate information is shared, and response efforts are coordinated efficiently. The communication

plan outlines the procedures and channels for internal and external communication during and after a security incident.

6.2 Communication Objectives:

The communication plan aims to achieve the following objectives:

6.2.1 Incident Reporting:

Define clear procedures and channels for reporting security incidents within the organization.

Establish designated points of contact for incident reporting, including the Incident Response Team (IRT) members and management representatives.

Communicate the importance of prompt incident reporting to all employees and stakeholders to facilitate timely response actions.

6.2.2 Internal Communication:

Establish communication protocols for internal stakeholders, including employees, management, and relevant departments or teams.

Define communication channels for sharing incident-related information, such as email distribution lists, instant messaging platforms, or internal collaboration tools.

Determine the frequency and content of internal incident updates, ensuring that relevant stakeholders receive timely and accurate information.

Designate a communication coordinator within the Incident Response Team (IRT) to oversee and facilitate internal communication efforts.

6.2.3 External Communication:

Identify key external stakeholders who need to be notified during a security incident, such as customers, partners, regulatory bodies, or law enforcement agencies, based on legal and contractual obligations.

Establish communication channels and points of contact for external stakeholders.

Define the appropriate level of information to be shared externally, considering the sensitivity of the incident and legal or regulatory requirements.

Designate a communication coordinator within the Incident Response Team (IRT) to manage external communication efforts and ensure consistency in messaging.

6.2.4 Communication Templates:

Develop standardized incident communication templates that can be used during different phases of the incident response process, such as initial incident notification, progress updates, and post-incident summaries.

Include necessary information in the templates, such as the incident description, impact assessment, response actions taken, and recommended mitigation measures.

6.2.5 Escalation Procedures:

Clearly define escalation procedures for incidents based on severity, impact, or other predefined criteria.

Specify the roles and responsibilities of the Incident Response Team (IRT) members and management representatives during the escalation process.

Establish communication channels and contact information for escalating incidents to higher levels of management or involving external entities.

6.2.6 Media and Public Relations:

Establish guidelines and procedures for handling media inquiries and public relations during and after a significant security incident.

Designate a spokesperson or a media contact within the organization to provide consistent and accurate information to the media and the public.

If applicable, coordinate with the organization's public relations or corporate communications team to align incident messaging with the organization's overall communication strategy.

6.3 Communication Plan Review and Updates:

Regularly review and update the communication plan to reflect changes in organizational structure, contact information, or regulatory requirements.

Conduct periodic exercises or simulations to test the effectiveness of the communication plan and identify areas for improvement.

Incorporate lessons learned from previous incidents into the communication plan to enhance future incident response efforts.

By having a well-defined communication plan, the organization can ensure that incident-related information is disseminated effectively, stakeholders are appropriately informed, and incident response activities are coordinated efficiently.

Remember to customize the communication plan section to reflect the specific communication channels, stakeholders, and escalation procedures relevant to your organization's structure, industry, and incident response capabilities.

7.0 Incident Response Documentation:

7.1 Purpose:

Effective documentation is crucial during incident response to ensure that relevant information is recorded, actions taken are documented, and valuable lessons learned are captured for future reference. Incident response documentation provides a comprehensive record of the incident, its impact, response activities, and any necessary follow-up actions.

7.2 Types of Documentation:

7.2.1 Incident Reporting:

Develop incident reporting templates or forms to standardize the information collected during incident reporting. Include details such as the date and time of the incident, a brief description of the event, an initial impact assessment, and contact information of the reporting party.

Specify the procedures and channels for submitting incident reports to the designated points of contact within the Incident Response Team (IRT) or management.

7.2.2 Incident Logs:

Maintain a centralized incident log to record all relevant incident-related activities, including detection, analysis, containment, eradication, and recovery efforts.

Include essential details such as the incident ID, date and time of each activity, individuals involved, actions taken, and any notable findings or observations.

7.2.3 Incident Details:

Document comprehensive incident details, including a detailed description of the incident, the systems or assets affected, the potential impact on the organization, and the initial assessment of the incident severity.

Capture relevant technical information such as IP addresses, indicators of compromise (IoCs), malware samples, network traffic logs, or any other evidence collected during the incident response process.

7.2.4 Response Actions:

Document the response actions taken during each phase of the incident response process. Include step-by-step procedures, commands executed, tools used, and any changes made to systems or configurations.

Record the progress and status of each response action, ensuring that all actions are well-documented and traceable.

7.2.5 Communication Records:

Maintain records of all internal and external communications related to the incident. This includes emails, instant messaging conversations, phone call logs, and other relevant communication artifacts.

Record the date, time, participants, and key points discussed during each communication event.

7.2.6 Lessons Learned:

Capture lessons learned from each incident to improve future incident response efforts.

Document the root causes of the incident, vulnerabilities or gaps identified, and recommendations for mitigating similar incidents in the future.

Include any changes made to policies, procedures, or security controls based on the lessons learned.

7.3 Incident Response Documentation Repository:

Establish a centralized and secure repository to store incident response documentation.

Implement access controls and permissions to ensure that only authorized individuals can view, modify, or delete the document.

Regularly back up the documentation repository to prevent data loss.

7.4 Document Retention and Review:

Define the retention period for incident response documentation based on legal, regulatory, or organizational requirements.

Establish procedures for reviewing and updating the incident response documentation on a regular basis or as needed.

Conduct periodic reviews of the documentation to ensure its accuracy, relevance, and alignment with industry best practices.

By maintaining comprehensive incident response documentation, the organization can ensure a clear record of each incident, facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among the Incident Response Team (IRT) members, and improve incident response capabilities over time.

8.0 Training and Awareness:

8.1 Purpose:

Training and awareness programs play a vital role in building an organization's strong incident response capability. They ensure that employees and stakeholders are knowledgeable about incident response procedures, aware of potential risks, and equipped to respond effectively to security incidents.

8.2 Training Objectives:

8.2.1 General Security Awareness:

Develop and deliver general security awareness training programs to educate employees about common security threats, best practices for secure behavior, and the importance of incident reporting.

Cover topics such as password hygiene, phishing awareness, safe browsing habits, social engineering, and the responsible use of company resources.

Provide training materials in various formats, such as online modules, presentations, or interactive workshops, to cater to different learning preferences.

8.2.2 Incident Response Procedures:

Conduct specialized training sessions to familiarize employees with the organization's incident response procedures, including their roles and responsibilities during an incident.

Train employees on recognizing and reporting security incidents promptly, emphasizing the importance of early detection and response.

Provide clear instructions on incident reporting channels, including contact information for the Incident Response Team (IRT) members or designated points of contact.

8.2.3 Technical Training:

Offer technical training programs to enhance the skills of IT and security personnel involved in incident response.

Provide training on tools, technologies, and techniques used for incident detection, analysis, containment, eradication, and recovery.

Cover areas such as log analysis, malware analysis, network forensics, incident handling methodologies, and incident response automation.

8.2.4 Role-Specific Training:

Tailor training programs to specific job roles and functions within the organization.

Provide specialized training to individuals who may have critical roles during incident response, such as IT administrators, network engineers, system administrators, or members of the Incident Response Team (IRT).

Focus on building the necessary skills and knowledge required to fulfill their responsibilities effectively.

8.3 Training Delivery Methods:

8.3.1 Instructor-Led Training:

Conduct in-person or virtual instructor-led training sessions for large groups or specific teams within the organization.

Include interactive elements such as hands-on exercises, case studies, and group discussions to enhance learning and engagement.

8.3.2 Online Training:

Develop and deploy online training modules or courses accessible to all employees.

Utilize learning management systems (LMS) or online platforms to deliver self-paced training modules.

Include assessments or quizzes to evaluate knowledge retention and provide certificates of completion for motivation.

8.3.3 Awareness Materials:

Create awareness materials such as posters, infographics, newsletters, or email campaigns to reinforce key security messages.

Regularly share security tips, updates on emerging threats, and success stories of incident response efforts to keep employees informed and engaged.

8.4 Continuous Awareness:

8.4.1 Awareness Campaigns:

Conduct regular awareness campaigns to reinforce security best practices and incident response procedures.

Use various communication channels, such as intranet portals, email newsletters, or internal social media platforms, to share security-related news, tips, and reminders.

8.4.2 Incident Response Drills and Simulations:

Organize periodic incident response drills and simulations to test the effectiveness of incident response procedures and identify areas for improvement.

Simulate realistic scenarios and evaluate the response capabilities of employees and the Incident Response Team (IRT).

Document lessons learned from these exercises and incorporate them into training and incident response procedures.

8.4.3 Refresher Training:

Offer refresher training sessions or modules periodically to ensure employees maintain their incident response knowledge and skills.

Focus on recent developments in security threats, incident response techniques, and organizational changes that may impact incident response.

8.5 Measurement and Evaluation:

Establish metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the effectiveness of training and awareness programs.

Measure the incident detection and reporting rates, employee satisfaction with training, and the improvement in incident response time.

Gather feedback from employees and stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to the training programs.

By implementing comprehensive training and awareness programs, organizations can empower their employees to become active participants in the incident response process, strengthening the overall security posture and incident response capabilities.

Remember to tailor the training and awareness section to fit your organization's specific training needs, industry requirements, and employee demographics.

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9.0 Testing and Evaluation:

9.1 Purpose:

Testing and evaluation are critical components of an effective incident response plan. They help validate the plan's effectiveness, identify potential gaps or weaknesses, and provide opportunities for improvement. By conducting regular tests and evaluations, organizations can ensure that their incident response capabilities are robust and capable of effectively mitigating and responding to security incidents.

9.2 Types of Testing:

9.2.1 Tabletop Exercises:

Tabletop exercises involve simulated incident scenarios that are discussed and analyzed in a group setting. Key stakeholders, including members of the Incident Response Team (IRT) and relevant departments, participate in the exercise to evaluate the effectiveness of incident response procedures, communication, and coordination. The exercise facilitates a collaborative environment for identifying areas of improvement and validating the incident response plan's adequacy.

9.2.2 Functional Exercises:

Functional exercises simulate real-world incident response scenarios to test the actual execution of incident response procedures. These exercises involve the active participation of the Incident Response Team (IRT) and relevant personnel who perform their roles and responsibilities based on predefined incident scenarios. Functional exercises help identify operational challenges, bottlenecks, and areas where response actions can be optimized.

9.2.3 Technical Testing:

Technical testing involves assessing the effectiveness of technical controls, systems, and infrastructure during incident response. It includes activities such as vulnerability assessments, penetration testing, and red teaming exercises. These tests help identify vulnerabilities, weaknesses, or misconfigurations that adversaries may exploit and provide insights into the effectiveness of security controls and incident response processes.

9.3 Evaluation:

9.3.1 Post-Incident Review:

Conducting post-incident reviews after a security incident allows for an in-depth evaluation of the incident response efforts. The review involves assessing the response actions, communication effectiveness, decision-making processes, and overall incident management. The findings from the review can be used to identify areas

of improvement, update incident response procedures, and enhance the organization's incident response capabilities.

9.3.2 Metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

Establish metrics and KPIs to measure the effectiveness of incident response activities. Metrics such as mean time to detect (MTTD), mean time to respond (MTTR), and incident closure rates can provide insights into the efficiency and effectiveness of the incident response process. Regularly monitoring and analyzing these metrics allows organizations to identify trends, measure progress, and address performance gaps.

9.3.3 Lessons Learned:

Capture and document lessons learned from testing and evaluation activities to drive continuous improvement. Identify recurring issues, challenges, or successes observed during testing and evaluation and incorporate them into the incident response plan and training programs. Sharing these lessons learned with the Incident Response Team (IRT) and stakeholders helps enhance their knowledge and ensure that improvements are implemented.

9.4 Continuous Improvement:

9.4.1 Action Plan:

Based on the findings from testing and evaluation, develop an action plan to address identified gaps, weaknesses, or areas for improvement. The action plan should have clear timelines and milestones to track progress and ensure timely implementation. Assign responsible individuals or teams to implement the necessary changes and enhancements.

9.4.2 Regular Reviews:

Schedule regular reviews and updates of the incident response plan to incorporate lessons learned, industry best practices, and changes in the organization's environment. By periodically reviewing and updating the plan, organizations can stay aligned with evolving threats and technologies and ensure the plan remains effective.

9.4.3 Continuous Testing:

Continuously test and evaluate the incident response capabilities through regular exercises, simulations, and technical assessments. Incorporate feedback from stakeholders and participants to fine-tune incident response procedures, identify emerging risks, and validate the effectiveness of implemented improvements.

By conducting regular testing and evaluation activities, organizations can ensure that their incident response capabilities are robust, up-to-date, and capable of effectively mitigating security incidents. Continuous improvement based on the findings from testing and evaluation activities allows organizations to enhance their incident response capabilities and adapt to evolving threats and challenges.

10. Plan Maintenance:

Designate a responsible person to review and update the plan on a regular basis or as needed.

Incorporate changes based on new threats, regulatory requirements, or lessons learned from previous incidents.

11. Plan Activation:

11.1 Purpose:

Plan activation outlines the process of initiating the incident response plan when a security incident occurs. It provides guidelines for promptly and effectively mobilizing the Incident Response Team (IRT) and initiating the necessary response activities.

11.2 Incident Identification:

Establish clear criteria and triggers for incident identification, such as security event monitoring, system alerts, user reports, or external notifications.

Define the roles and responsibilities of individuals or teams responsible for incident identification, including IT staff, security personnel, and end-users.

Specify the procedures for reporting and documenting the incident, including the required information and the designated points of contact within the IRT.

11.3 Incident Reporting and Escalation:

Define the incident reporting and escalation procedures to ensure that incidents are promptly communicated to the appropriate personnel.

Establish multiple reporting channels, including dedicated incident response hotlines, email addresses, or web-based incident reporting forms.

Clearly outline the escalation process, specifying the individuals or teams to notify based on the incident severity, impact, or predefined criteria.

11.4 Incident Response Team (IRT) Activation:

Identify the key roles and responsibilities within the IRT and specify the individuals or teams assigned to each role.

Outline the activation process for the IRT, including how to notify and assemble the team members promptly.

Define the communication channels to be used for IRT coordination during incident response.

11.5 Decision-Making and Incident Assessment:

Establish the process for incident assessment to evaluate the severity, impact, and potential risks associated with the incident.

Define the criteria for escalating incidents to senior management or other decision-makers based on the predefined thresholds or incident characteristics.

Specify the individuals or teams responsible for making critical decisions during the incident response process.

11.6 Incident Declaration:

Define the conditions for declaring an incident, including the severity, potential impact, or predefined criteria.

If required, specify the procedures for formally declaring an incident, including the necessary documentation and communication to stakeholders, management, or external entities.

11.7 Resources and Support:

Identify the resources and support required during incident response, such as technical specialists, legal counsel, public relations, or external incident response vendors.

Establish procedures for requesting and coordinating additional resources, ensuring they are readily available when needed.

11.8 Communication:

Define the communication protocols for incident response, including internal and external communication channels.

Specify the key stakeholders to be notified during the incident response process, such as senior management, legal departments, regulatory authorities, or customers.

Outline the guidelines for communicating incident updates, progress, and resolution to stakeholders and the affected parties.

11.9 Documentation:

Specify the incident documentation requirements during plan activation, including incident reports, incident logs, evidence collection, and other relevant documentation.

Define the responsible individuals or teams for documenting incident details, response actions, and notable findings or observations.

11.10 Plan Deactivation:

Define the criteria and procedures for deactivating the incident response plan once the incident has been resolved and normal operations have been restored.

Specify the steps for documenting the incident resolution, conducting post-incident reviews, and initiating any necessary follow-up actions.

By clearly defining the process for plan activation, organizations can ensure a swift and coordinated response to security incidents. This section should be customized to reflect the specific incident response procedures and roles within your organization.

12. References:

List any relevant external documents, standards, or guidelines used as references for incident response.

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13. Revision History:

Keep a record of changes made to the incident response plan, including revision dates and descriptions of modifications.

Remember to tailor this template to meet your organization's specific needs and regulatory requirements. It's essential to regularly review, update, and test your incident response plan to ensure its effectiveness and alignment with evolving threats and industry practices.