

PRESS RELEASE
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CATHAY PACIFIC: THE MOST DISASTROUS AIRLINE BREACH IN HISTORY

Straits Interactive, data privacy specialist, cautions against downplaying the potential impact of data breaches

Cathay Pacific joins Air Canada, Delta Airlines, and British Airways in the spate of data breaches which have affected up to 10 million individuals so far this year. With over 9.4 million potentially affected customers, this is the worst airline data breach to date.

The issue with data breaches is not the violation itself, but the seriousness of the potential effects on companies and their customers in the aftermath. With recent data protection laws in place across the ASEAN region, data breaches are no longer an IT issue but one which affects the entire company, including board and senior management. Companies risk being faced with extensive enforcement actions and sky-high fines.

For individuals, stolen personal data inevitably ends up on the Dark Web [where it can be sold for up to \\$2000](#). Social security numbers and banking details can range from \$5 to \$150, and passports and medical records can be sold for between \$1000 and \$2000.

While the airline stated "The combination of data accessed varies for each affected passenger", saying there is "no evidence" of misuse of data, personal information potentially accessed from the records can be used as proof of identity. Data containing the personal information such as passport numbers, identity card numbers, and frequent flier details, will probably be worth millions of dollars on the Dark Web. The true impact could take weeks or months to come to light.

Through this data, hackers can steal flights and earn millions of air miles, but can also attack personal accounts, redirect correspondence by changing details, borrow money from loan sharks, and send phishing emails in an attempt to manipulate users.

Said Kevin Shepherdson, CEO Straits Interactive, "Given the magnitude of the breach, moving forward, airline passengers should practice vigilance when travelling or booking tickets whether it is via a booking app or web site. They are particularly susceptible to phishing and social engineering, which can come in the form of fake flight notifications. In fact, their demographic profile suggests that passengers tend to share additional

personal information more openly and would be classified in a higher income bracket, which makes them attractive to scammers and hackers."

While it can be assumed that a breach of 9.4 million passengers' data spans multiple countries, it remains to be seen whether privacy commissions across the world will investigate this breach and subject Cathay Pacific to local privacy laws and those in the EU (General Data Protection Regulation). Nevertheless, this incident raises serious concerns about how common data breaches are becoming and how they are being addressed.

This latest breach should therefore be a wake-up call for those in the airline service industry to review their operational efforts and systems from a privacy and security perspective so as to ensure compliance with data protection laws. As for travelling passengers, it is no longer just about flight safety but also, the safety of their personal information that needs to be considered.

Every company should reassess their data protection policies. To find out more please visit [Straits Interactive](#).

About Straits Interactive

- CEO Kevin Shepherdson is a leader in data privacy platform solutions, with over 20 years' experience in the IT and data privacy Industries. International author of "99 Privacy Breaches to Beware of", Kevin is also a Fellow in Information Privacy and has consulted for over 50 listed and multinational companies on data privacy.
- Straits Interactive delivers end-to-end governance, risk and compliance solutions that enable trusted businesses and responsible marketing, especially in the areas of data protection and privacy.
- Founded in 2013, Straits Interactive has delivered the first integrated privacy compliance management platform for local organisations in ASEAN.
- Straits Interactive helps businesses achieve operational compliance and manage risk, through a combination of cloud technology and professional services.

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