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Shrinking hardware, tighter security

BY Michelle Speir

From miniature PCs to watches that receive live data, one trend at the CeBit America conference in New York last month was tiny hardware. In addition, wireless technology is still hot, with an emphasis on wireless security. But good, old-fashioned hardware security hasn't gone out of style.

Silicon Data Vault

Medieval castles were protected from intruders by walls many feet thick, but many also had a moat as an extra layer of protection. If today's hard drives are yesterday's castles, the new Silicon Data Vault (SDV) from Secure Systems International LLC is the moat.

The SDV is a piece of hardware that sits between the hard drive and the BIOS, also known as the Basic Input/Output System, and prevents unauthorized access not only to the hard drive but also to the operating system. It shuts out hackers by closing operating system backdoors or vulnerabilities. The device also minimizes the risk of boot sector virus infection.

The SDV allows you to create up to 32 partitions on your hard drive. Each partition is secured with a unique key using 128-bit Advanced Encryption Standard. Administrators can manage access to the partition on the fly within the operating system using the company's patented partition-management software. The keys are never stored in plain text on the system.

You can use the SDV with any operating system, and there are versions for both desktop and notebook PCs. The desktop version is a PC card that plugs into the hard drive's existing Integrated Drive Electronics channel and has no electrical connection to the motherboard. For notebooks, the SDV hard-drive assembly replaces the existing hard drive. It also plugs into the IDE channel of the original hard drive.

Features include operating system backup and restore functions; BIOS and CMOS backup and verification; an audit log with an unlimited number of user profiles; and the ability to recover from a lost or damaged SDV.

The laptop version of the SDV costs $1,000, and the desktop version sells for $850. For more information, visit www.securesystems.com.