

# SMBs, consumers & ISPs: Why it's time for a fresh, united approach to digital privacy.

How businesses can help defend consumers from online threats.

Fears about the security of public Wi-Fi, along with the flash-rise of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies, are fueling a pervasive sense of digital fatigue and anxiety among both consumers and small businesses. As findings from a 2025 survey conducted by residential and business fiber internet provider Kinetic make clear, people generally lack confidence in their online safety, yet they feel underequipped to protect themselves against persistent, sophisticated digital threats. What's more, as we learned from a separate Kinetic survey, leaders of small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) feel similarly under-resourced and under-prepared to protect their networks, data and users from attack.

However, as detailed here in the 2025 Kinetic Business Digital Safety & Privacy Report, this widespread online unease creates a golden opportunity for SMBs—and by extension, the internet service providers (ISPs) they rely upon for broadband internet connectivity—to become proactive partners with consumers. Providing people with more secure Wi-Fi networks and broadband internet service, SMBs and ISPs can build relationships and trust with customers, form a stronger united front against online threats, and in doing so, reap competitive benefits themselves.



# A pervasive sense of online vulnerability.

In August 2025, Kinetic Business surveyed more than 400 consumers across its 18-state footprint. Less than one-quarter (22%) of respondents expressed confidence that the online security measures they have in place are effective at protecting data and privacy. More than three-quarters (77%) expressed moderate to extreme concern about their internet safety.

## CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

Security measures are effective



Concern about internet safety



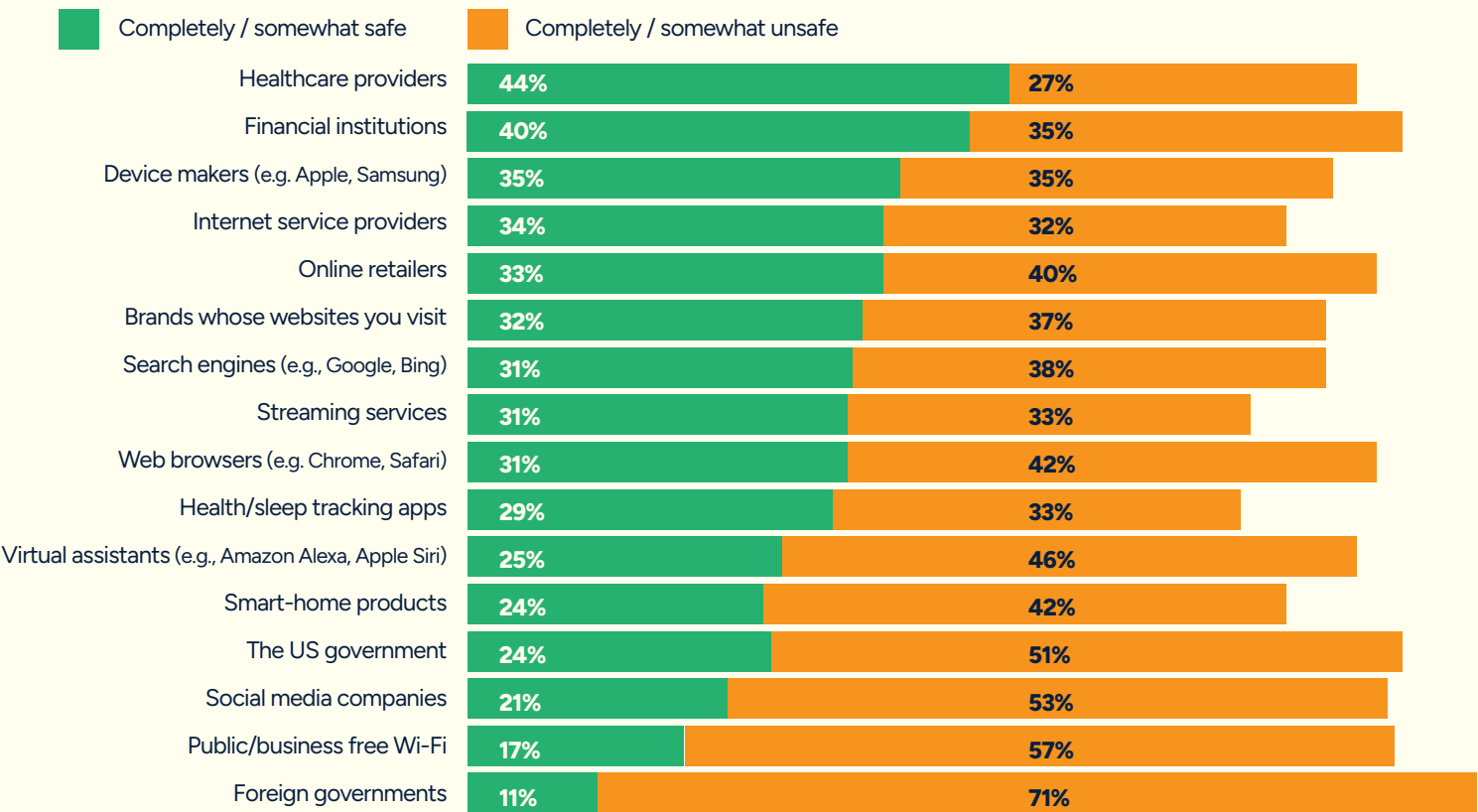
## Trust in the Security of Public and Open-Access Wi-Fi Networks is Lacking.

The report found that when it comes to third parties handling of personal data, consumers’ sense of safety correlates directly to the perceived control and accountability of those third parties. Trust erodes when consumers lack visibility into, and control over, who’s collecting their data and how it’s being used.

This dynamic manifests in our survey findings. For example, respondents said they feel their data is safest in the hands of internet service providers (ISPs) along with providers of other essential and professionally managed services like healthcare and banking. On the other hand, more than half (57%) of respondents indicated they feel their data is unsafe when using an open-access public or business Wi-Fi network.

## FEELING [IN]SECURE

How safe do you feel when each of the following uses your personal data?



**AI Tops the List of Concerning Tech.**

As ubiquitous as AI has become in business and at home, it's a prime source of online insecurity for survey respondents. Asked to identify how specific technologies influence their perception of online safety, 61% of respondents said AI makes them feel less safe, far outdistancing smart-home technology (39%), cloud data-storage (35%), and Internet of Things (IoT) devices (34%).

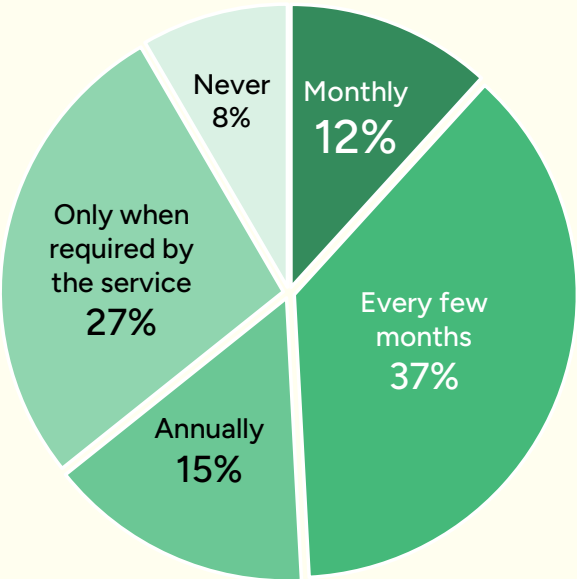
**Digital Fatigue Leads to Inertia.**

Instead of taking a proactive protective stance in the face of mounting security and privacy concerns, many respondents are defaulting to inaction, while relatively few are using proven, well-known steps to protect themselves. Slightly more than one-third (37%) of respondents indicated they update their passwords every few months, for example, while less than one-third said they change privacy setting on their accounts, use private browsing or read privacy policy updates.

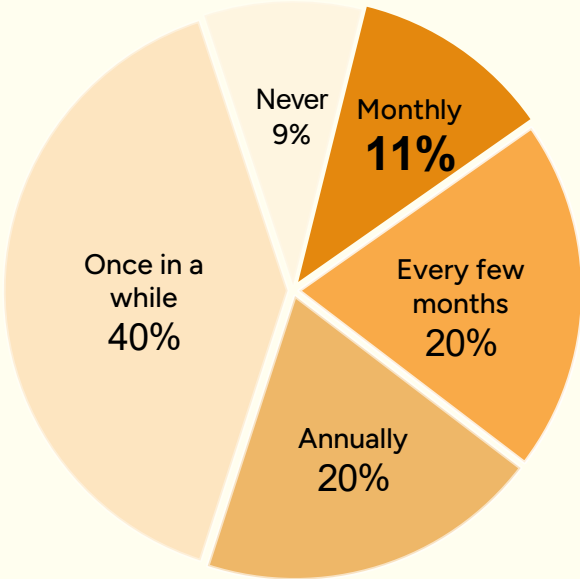
The inference here is clear: People feel fatigue when it comes to fighting the daily digital privacy battle. They want protection that doesn't require them to be technically adept and constantly vigilant. **In short, they want technology solutions, including internet service, that employ a "set-it-and-forget-it" approach,** where the technology provider embeds security measures and frequent updates into its service, giving customers confidence that the provider is actively working on their behalf to protect their data and privacy.

**SIGNS OF FATIGUE**

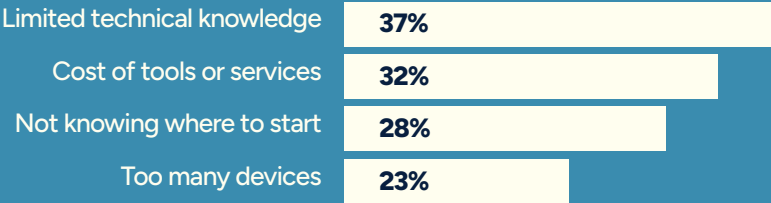
On average, how often do you **update your passwords** for online services?



How often do you **review or update** your internet **security settings**?



**Reasons consumers aren't more proactive about security**



# SMBs believe they're falling short, too.

Consumers aren't the only ones feeling exposed to online threats. Based on a previous survey of more than 300 business owners, directors, and managers, [Kinetic Business' 2025 Small and Medium-Sized Business Technology Report](#) reveals a troubling disconnect. A sizable majority of SMB leaders—59%—acknowledge their organization needs to improve cybersecurity. Yet slightly less than half (49%) said their organizations intend to invest in cybersecurity technology this year. That vulnerability is exacerbated by a lack of in-house know-how: 52% of SMB leaders said they lack the on-staff training and technical expertise to manage threats.

## SMB CYBER TECH USE

Need to improve cybersecurity

59%

Plan on investing in cybersecurity

49%

**A Strong Business Case for SMBs to Invest.** Clearly, most consumers lack sophisticated technical expertise, tools and resources to protect themselves adequately, or so they perceive. That's where SMBs can help. As heavily as consumers continue to use business-provided and public-access guest Wi-Fi networks (despite an apparent lack of trust in them), businesses can take steps to ensure that their public-facing networks include multiple layers of security to preserve the online safety and privacy of users and their data, and that they're transparent with users about data collection and usage. When a business invests to help protect their consumers data, it can earn their good will, trust and loyalty—intangibles that can turn into tangible benefits for the business.

When a business strengthens the security of their Wi-Fi networks and related infrastructure, they aren't just protecting consumers; they're also protecting themselves. The old saying, "A rising tide lifts all boats" applies to SMBs taking measures to protect networks and data from threats. Businesses that invest in broadband internet services with strong built-in digital protections around both their business-facing and public-facing networks are not only helping safeguard customers and their data, but they're also safeguarding their own employees, data, infrastructure and intellectual property.

"In today's digital era, much of our daily lives—work, learning, banking, entertainment and more—is done online. Digital privacy is the foundation of modern trust; families need it to be safe; businesses need it to operate with confidence. Digital security solutions that enhance a consumers' desire to increase privacy and protect data are no longer optional; they are vital to protecting that data against threats and unneeded security risks."

— Ric Chura, Chief Information Officer, Uniti





**A Call to Action for ISPs.** The Kinetic Business Digital Safety & Privacy Report makes clear that businesses and consumers are sending a strong message to the internet service providers: ISP customers need help protecting data and privacy. At home. At work. And in public spaces.

To create a united front against online criminals and scammers, we have to start at the service level. It's imperative that ISPs provide businesses and consumers with internet services that include sophisticated, and simple, measures to protect against the specific risks they face, and it's even more important that ISPs consistently updates those measures to reflect the ever-evolving threat landscape.

Many businesses and consumers lack the resources, expertise and do-it-yourself ability to keep themselves protected online, so ISPs have an opportunity to assume a lead role in defense. Those that offer broadband services with the combination of advanced digital protections, high performance and high reliability are bound to earn consumer trust, loyalty and wallet share.

**How One ISP is Supporting and Protecting its Business and Residential Customers.** Kinetic Business is committed to enhancing the digital security of SMBs and consumers alike with future-ready technology, powered by a reliable and secure fiber-optic network, that addresses current and evolving security needs. Internet services are available for residential, business and enterprise locations to ensure data and internet safety remain a top priority.

Additionally, [Kinetic's Business Ready Internet](#), is an all-in-one solution designed specifically for small businesses and combines fast, reliable fiber internet with advanced Wi-Fi, security, and network resilience. Rather than relying on multiple and disparate solutions, small businesses can now rely on one product for their connectivity needs to help them to maintain and secure operations, boost productivity and improve profitability.

**"Today's businesses need support, lightning-fast and reliable connectivity to power operations, and simple, effective security solutions to protect their company, bottom lines, reputations, and most importantly, their customer data. We know SMB owners are strapped for resources, and it's more critical than ever for technology providers to deliver solutions that offer simplicity, affordability, and peace of mind."**

— Art Nichols, Chief Technology Officer, Uniti



# Five practical steps for SMBs:

These simple but important measures are critical to protecting online safety and privacy without compromising the quality of digital experiences:

- 1 **Look for business internet service that bundles high-speed fiber broadband with security.** The service should include integrated security measures (firewall, encryption, etc.) in tandem with high-speed fiber broadband, which offers clear performance and reliability advantages over other options.
- 2 **Look for an ISP that regularly updates the security measures inside their internet service offering,** without cost or disruption to your business. You want an ISP who takes the security of its SMB customers seriously by consistently updating its services to keep pace with the latest threats. If they don't, it could be time to find an ISP that does.
- 3 **Seek out an ISP that will support you along every step of your digital journey,** including expert guidance when you need it, accessible 24/7/365.
- 4 **Ask your ISP about additional layers of protection,** such as an endpoint security solution, for example. If they offer them, take advantage.
- 5 **Ensure your business stays diligent and vigilant.** Protecting your organization's data and privacy is a joint effort between your ISP and you. Be sure to take basic steps such as updating passwords often, segmenting your public-facing Wi-Fi network from your internal Wi-Fi network, and generally enforcing and reinforcing good digital hygiene habits and a security-first culture across your workforce.

**Go Deeper.** Want more insight into consumer data privacy concerns and the role of internet security in modern households and small businesses? Check out this original Kinetic research report: [“The Impact of Fiber Internet on Consumers and Small Businesses.”](#)

**About the Survey Data & Findings.** The findings in this report are based on a survey conducted by Kinetic from August 14-20, 2025, across the company's 18-state footprint. The study included 436 respondents between the ages of 18 and 60, recruited from independent consumer panels with no affiliation to Kinetic or the research firm that supported the survey. The survey explored home internet usage and data security habits. The sample was balanced by age, gender, and geographic market to ensure representativeness.

**About Kinetic.** Kinetic, a business unit of Uniti (NASDAQ: UNIT), is a premier insurgent provider of multi-gigabit fiber internet, whole-home Wi-Fi, internet security, and voice services in 1,400 markets across 18 states in the Southwestern, Southeastern, Midwestern and Northeastern U.S. Additional information about Kinetic is available at [kineticbusiness.com](https://kineticbusiness.com).



Internet  
better.

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