



From Joystick to Job: Gamers Provide Recruitment Base for Cybersecurity Shortfall

[fa icon="calendar"] Jul 15, 2016 1:01:52 PM / by [Michael Stone](#)

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IT giant Cisco figured that, as of 2014, the world would be short 1 million cybersecurity pros to fend off the constant threat of online attackers, who seem to grow in number and sophistication by the minute. Meanwhile, as many as 1.2 billion people [were estimated by Spil Games](#) to be video-game players by the end of 2013.



Related numbers? Superficially somewhat: Both groups do carry the stereotype of being more connected to screens than most other things. But there's a push to more tightly join them; to unify them under the same flag; to, specifically, make gaming a training and recruitment tool for the cybersecurity community — much as has been speculated with [first-person shooters and the military](#).

“Every year, young adults are choosing career paths, and the cybersecurity field needs a way to draw the masses,” [a 2015 paper](#) from Carnegie Mellon University's Software Engineering Institute argues. “A cybersecurity-based game has the potential to make a difference in their choice. ... Additionally, games can provide a virtual proving ground for cybersecurity professionals — cybersecurity is a field where you do not want to experience an attack for the first time on live infrastructure where data and money are on the line.”

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Indeed, '90s parents might contend that their kids manipulating pixels with a controller is nothing but a time-waster, brain-rotter and social-disabler. But much research has popped up over the last decade or so that [preaches their beneficial teachings](#), including social interaction, working through mental illness, goal achievement and how joint efforts can help accomplish those goals.

So with the perks and the cybersecurity workforce's needs in mind, video games specifically targeting teenagers and 20-somethings could work as recruiters while providing "a quality gaming experience and foster[ing] the gain of key cybersecurity knowledge and skills," the Carnegie Mellon paper says. Games do exist that are semi-related to the field, it notes, but these aren't geared toward the aforementioned age groups and aren't "comprehensive enough to set the appropriate foundation required for a cybersecurity professional."

Introduction of the games would serve as an advertisement that school-age kids don't seem to be getting elsewhere. For example, despite the demand in cybersecurity and pushes for STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education, 82 percent of millennials in the U.S. said their teachers and guidance counselors never spoke of cybersecurity opportunities, according to [a 2013 study](#) organized by defense contractor Raytheon.

But there have been success stories in the cybersecurity-video game intersection. Perhaps the most well-known example is the [Cyber Security Challenge UK](#). The challenge includes the virtual skyscraper [Cyphinx](#), which serves as a portal for users to be launched into the challenge's games and competitions.

Like in for-fun games, Cyphinx players choose avatars and can interact with other players. They accumulate scores in specific cybersecurity disciplines — including risk analysis, network defense and ethics — and with many real-world employers among the sponsors, the scores can serve as a way to show off and get work (for younger generations) or change work (for career adults).

A notable example: the 38-year-old car dealership network engineer who won in the challenge's masterclass category in 2015 and, [according to the Daily Dot](#), was given "career-enhancing prizes and lucrative job opportunities at different tech firms."

One thing besides simply demand that video games and guidance counselors might promote is the dollar sign. Though the path to millionaire-ship isn't an instant one in cybersecurity, the paychecks certainly aren't deficient, with U.S. News & World Report [putting the median salary at \\$88,890](#).

It also ranked the job No. 6 among the best jobs of 2015.

Beginning in a cybersecurity career "will seem like a wonderful, marvelous adventure," [tech security company Intel Security Group writes](#), "and you'll always be able to say that at least some of the skills that have taken you towards a well-paid and exciting journey in life were honed on a

controller in your bedroom.”

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Written by [Michael Stone](#)

Michael Stone is a writer and photographer based in Gainesville, Florida, who has had his work published in several newspapers, magazines, and websites. He writes about a variety of topics, including technology and its impact on healthcare and education. He holds degrees in journalism and communications from the University of Florida and Middle Tennessee State University. You can read more about him on his website, www.MichaelStoneOnline.com.

Terri Foschini Fri Jul 15 20:11:19 2016

Wondering if it's too late for me. I would love to make an average of \$88,000 a year or more. I would have to go back to school forever at an age of 50 late something. Good article!

↩ Reply to *Terri Foschini*

Michael Stone Thu Jul 28 19:12:32 2016

I appreciate that, Terri. The way I see it is it's never too late for anything!

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North America:
 877-742-6832 X1
 sales@iboss.com

International:
 858-568-7051 X1
 sales@iboss.com

EMEIA:
 +44 (0) 203 713 0471
 emeia@iboss.com

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