Digital detectives in demand

Security organisations here are keen to recruit more cyber sleuths, says TAN CHONG YAW

The Singapore Police Force, accounting firms and security centres are among the organisations in Singapore which are hiring an increasing number of staff for their cyber-forensic skills.

Just as how a crime scene investigator tracks down a thief using clues at a crime scene, a cyber-forensic expert does the same sleuthing but by delving into hard disks, cellphones and IT systems.

“IDA’s latest manpower survey released last year showed a shortfall of 4.4 per cent in Singapore’s 2,600-strong infocomm security workforce,” said Mr Wally Lee, president of the Association of Information Security Professionals.

“I can see the demand for staff, which includes those trained in cyber-forensics skills, only growing stronger.”

Cybercrimes may be in the form of large-scale attacks, such as the one on the Yahoo network in July when hackers stole more than 400,000 passwords, simple e-mail scams or the more straightforward employee thefts of a company’s sensitive information.

Consulting and accounting firm KPMG’s forensic services head Bob Yap told Digital Life: “We have definitely seen a significant increase in the demand for cyber-forensic services.”

KPMG’s cyber-forensic team in Singapore started out with just one person in 2003. “We currently have 13 staff specialising in cyber-forensics,” Mr Yap said.

In the Police Force, it is the Technology Crime Forensic Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department where cyber-detectives are needed. Police spokesman Yvonne Edwin said: “The branch recruits both diploma and degree holders as forensic examiners. More of them will be recruited.”

Another employer in need of such skills here is cybersecurity firm Symantec. Earlier this month, it announced that it was setting up a Security Response Centre here, its first in the Asean region.

Meeting the demand for such skills are organisations such as the Kaplan Higher Education Institute here. It provides this specialised training at the bachelor degree level. The double-major part-time course has cyber-forensics and information security and management as one major. It can take 16 to 24 months to complete, depending on a student’s qualifications. The other major can be either business information systems or computer science.

Other providers include SIM University, the SMa (Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation) Institute of Higher Learning, Management Development Institute of Singapore and PSB Academy.

Temasek Polytechnic was the first here to offer a diploma in cyber and digital security in 2006. Last year, it began offering one in digital forensics, the only such diploma course here.

“Both the courses are popular and we see a strong interest in both,” said course manager Mandy Mak. These are niche courses and the polytechnic has kept class sizes to between 50 and 60 students.

Typical jobs for people with such skills include IT security consultant, penetration tester, security product developer, IT security or forensic auditor, Internet security officer and digital forensics analyst.

Demand for such specialised skills can only increase, said KPMG’s Mr Yap. He added: “As the world becomes more connected via cyberspace, we would expect cybercrimes to become increasingly common.”

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