

Jeremy Webb

Threat Intelligence Manager
at Royal Bank of Scotland

Jeremy Webb used to run his own web development company. Working in that field, he inevitably came across hackers.

Jeremy was intrigued immediately and searched for ways to get more involved in security. With a bit of “pure luck and big chance” he stumbled upon the SANS Cyber Academy 2017. He applied, followed the intensive training programme and, even before the course had ended, landed himself a job in the Security Operations Centre at the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Jeremy confesses that he is relatively new to the security world. “I just knew I was very curious about cyber security and although I have a reasonably geeky background, I needed serious security training.” He searched Google and one organisation kept coming up: SANS Institute. “The 2017 Cyber Academy was UK government funded, so I applied and was very lucky to get in. The programme really was an eye opener to me. It was diverse and sophisticated; I learned so much in a short period of time.” Jeremy explains that there were 55 people in the programme, and he praises the quality of the instructors. “At one time I felt a little bit like a fan, because I realised that I had books on the shelf back home, written by the instructor that came into the room to teach us that day.”

CASE STUDY

“Cyber security and outdoor expeditions bear great similarities.”

Thorough, up to date and relevant information

The programme was very information-rich, up to date and relevant. The team at SANS encouraged the trainees to reach out and apply for security roles in the market. “So I did”, says Jeremy. “I applied for a job at the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and by the last week of the programme I had a video interview with the team at RBS. Afterwards I went on holiday and when I got back, the job offer was waiting for me in the mail. Essentially, I already had a position secured even before the SANS programme had finished.” Jeremy is sure one of the key reasons he was hired so quickly was the GSEC and GCIH certifications from the Cyber Academy programme. “Those were highly regarded at RBS, so I was very lucky to be able to obtain those certifications during the programme.”

“Because of the certifications received at the Cyber Academy, I managed to get a cyber security job even before the course had ended.”

Unexpected parallels

When Jeremy was younger – before he started his own web development company, which he had for about 15 years – he was an outdoor expedition leader. Something quite different from his current job as a threat intelligence manager. Or perhaps not so different? He smiles and replies: “There are two absolute parallels between threat intel and outdoor expedition: understanding the risk and staying calm.” He tells us about a time in Canoa, Ecuador when he and a group of people he was leading were caught up in an earthquake. “It was a 5.6 and later a 7.1 on the Richter Scale. The small town fell apart right around us. Canoa is a coastal town, so I was really worried about a tsunami. We got organised quickly and reached higher grounds, only to find we were completely cut off from the outside world. We then had to evacuate which, all in all, lasted about 24 hours. That really was a life-changing experience.” But like anyone who has experienced danger knows, once the threat has passed and you have managed to stay calm and do the right thing, you eventually feel a certain thrill. In a way, Jeremy is preparing for the cyber security equivalent of his adventure in Ecuador. “Because real growth only comes when challenge matches skill.”

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Joining a community

When that threat or attack comes, Jeremy will be well equipped, as he still carries around all the handbooks and papers he was given during the Cyber Academy programme. These, along with the SANS Reading Room, webinars and advisory board, act as a solid foundation to expand his knowledge. "The advisory board is an amazing resource of top quality security professionals, to whom I can ask questions. This whole programme has been so much more than just a course; you are joining a community." Alongside the SANS community, the 55 people that were in the programme for three months also keep in touch. "We just had a reunion in London, to celebrate 12 months after finishing the programme. There are people I talk to quite regularly, to get help or advice from. We really bonded in those three months; these relationships are for the long term, and that is very valuable."

"Real growth comes only when challenge matches skill."

Changing his way of thinking

Attending the Cyber Academy is something Jeremy still feels very fortunate for. "It is an absolute privilege to have had the opportunity to go through the programme and learn all this information about a new subject. I finally feel that every day my mind is now being put to work and I am learning more than I ever thought possible. Web development ultimately became sort of a routine, whereas now every day is a challenge. The most rewarding feeling is knowing that I will get to reach my full potential." The final turning point into the security world for Jeremy was the day he walked home from a course, past a shop window that displayed a CCTV camera system. The shop advertised it as a way to make a home more secure. "But all I saw was a point of entry, something that could be hacked into. In that moment, I knew my way of thinking had changed forever."

Excited for the diversity of cyber security

Although Jeremy wants to expand his current cyber security knowledge and follow more SANS courses, the one skill he would love to wake up with tomorrow, isn't a technical one. "I would really want to be able to read minds so that I can understand what my adversaries are thinking. I would use that skill to better understand the thoughts, motivation and behaviour of the people that we are trying to protect ourselves and our organisations from." Although Jeremy doesn't spend every day in the outdoors anymore, he has surprised himself by feeling so captivated and intrigued by cyber security. "I am as excited and fired up as I was going on expeditions. I am still quite amazed at how interesting and diverse the cyber security field is."

SANS COURSES THAT JEREMY COMPLETED:

SEC401: Security Essentials Bootcamp Style

SEC504: Hacker Tools, Techniques, Exploits, and Incident Handling

SEC580: Metasploit Kung Fu for Enterprise Pen Testing

GIAC CERTIFICATIONS:

GCIH | GSEC

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