



FILLING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

74 percent of security practitioners recognise the positive impact training has on their respective industries

Sarah Hayward-Turton examines the important role of training in the professionalisation of the security sector

When was the last time you took a course and gained a reputable qualification? For some it will be school, college or university, others will have heard: “You have passed” after their driving test and decided that would be the last time they’d take an exam. Yet for an increasing number of security practitioners, the answer will be far more recent.

In late 2017, the Linx International Group published the results of a piece of research that investigated attitudes towards training. More than 1,000 security practitioners responded, and it revealed how they are beginning to take skills development very seriously, with continuous professional development (76 percent), certification (71 percent) and personal development (64 percent) cited as the three main drivers for undertaking training.

The survey also highlighted a wide acknowledgement of the importance of recognised training qualifications, with 81 percent stating its importance to them as an individual, 68 percent acknowledging its importance to the organisation and 74 percent recognising the positive impact that training qualifications have on their respective industries. If this survey was to run again, less than 18 months later, I suspect the percentages would likely be higher still.

There has been a lot of conversation surrounding the professionalisation of the security sector in recent years, however, we are now seeing a concerted shift as more and more people – whether those choosing security as a first career, armed forces and police professionals embarking on a second career or seasoned practitioners – seek out qualifications and take advantage of new certifications from reputable bodies to make themselves as capable and employable as possible in what is an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving sector.

FALLING BEHIND

To be blunt, if you are one of the few not keeping pace with the rate of change, whether that is the latest technologies, regulation or approaches to risk and management, you are not just standing still but falling further and further behind. You only need to speak to someone who has worked in the sector for a relatively short period of time to understand that the demands and expectations are very different from five years ago.

Think back to when you saw your first megapixel camera. It wasn’t so long ago, but now we talk about real-time facial recognition and other advanced analytics. Or, when asked about access control in conversation, it is less about cards and more the different forms of biometrics, the use of smart devices and integration with Microsoft Active Directory. But it is not just the technology that is changing. Security is finally finding its rightful place on the boardroom agenda, driven not only by the impact security breaches can have on an organisation’s reputation and revenues (the convergence of physical and cyber security was placed in the spotlight for many during their GDPR preparations), but also an acknowledgement that systems currently in use for security can deliver benefits to other parts of the organisation. A great example is VMS and PSIM solutions being used to integrate security, safety and building management systems.

Security practitioners need to be sponges, soaking up as much information about the latest technology, regulations and thinking as possible. The challenge is that there is a lot of misinformation and marketing hype out there. This is where a trusted training provider can make a big difference.

One of the biggest obstacles to getting in the training habit is a perceived lack of time – a resource that has become highly prized both personally and professionally in our ‘always-on’ lives. Training providers are recognising this and as a result, eLearning is becoming an extremely popular choice. If you have not taken an online course recently you will be surprised by how much they have changed. They are no longer the inferior cousin of classroom-based training, employing some of the latest teaching techniques and interactive technologies. They also represent great value, especially as they minimise the time and associated cost of being taken away from the day job and can often be completed

at the student’s own pace. What’s more, they can be assessed from anywhere.

A great example highlighting the impact of eLearning has been shared by Adam Robinson, a Platoon Commander in the British Army who recently set up his own security company in readiness for starting a new career when his military career ends. He studied for a Security Management Level 5 Diploma with PerpetuityARC Training, a year-long eLearning course and commented that: “The support I had was that of a classroom standard.” He added that: “I felt that someone had handed me a key to open a door to a new life.”

Another significant shift we are seeing is a move from taking a course to solve an urgent skills gap, to a more planned approach to professional development. We see this not only with organisations, but also individuals. Of course, there are still instances where you may be asked to quickly evidence your ability with a certificate for a very specific skill (such as mains compliance) and taking a one-day course is ideal. That said, a good training provider is able to work with you to identify current skills and knowledge gaps, as well as forecasting what is likely to be required in the future and putting a workable programme in place to bridge them.

At the same time, a lot of work has been done to provide security practitioners operating in technical,

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operational and management roles with clear development pathways that are recognised by the wider international security sector. It is now possible to progress from a bite-size course through the seven levels of BTEC, all the way to an MSc in International Security and Risk Management. When launched in 2016 in collaboration with the University of South Wales, the MSc in International Security and Risk Management set a new benchmark for vocational and academic excellence and provided a milestone in the professionalisation of our sector, followed by the first cohort graduating in December 2018.

TAKING ADVANTAGE

Formalised training, whether planned or ad-hoc, should form the basis of a security practitioner’s development programme, but being a sponge of the sector means taking advantage of all the learning options available. Being part of an industry association can be invaluable and I say this speaking from personal experience through my involvement with the ASIS Young Professionals UK chapter. It hosts regular events that help connect and prepare the next generation of security practitioners.

Another great way to boost knowledge (especially surrounding the latest technology innovations) is to walk the aisles of the major tradeshow such as The Security Event in Birmingham and IFSEC International in London. Both of these annual events have high-quality and free education programmes,

where subject matter experts from around the world convene in the theatres to share their insights.

With regular training becoming intrinsic to the role of a security practitioner, the next challenge is to make it possible for their hard work to be publicly recognised. This important missing piece in the professionalisation of the security sector was addressed in September 2017 with the launch of the Certified Technical Security Professional (CTSP)

SECURITY IS FINALLY STARTING TO FIND ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE ON THE BOARDROOM AGENDA

Register. The aim of CTSP is to raise professional standards. It provides a trusted searchable online register that prospective employers and customers can use to choose security practitioners (individuals fulfilling technical roles in the electronic security and fire sectors, including installation, maintenance and commissioning technicians/engineers, auditors and consultants) based on their independently verified qualifications and experience. From launch,

it has been supported by the British Security Industry Association (BSIA), Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board (SSAIB) in the UK and SIRA in Dubai.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Already the combination of qualifications and certification is having a positive impact on the sector, as Steven Crosskey from CCTV South explains: "I've had a rather large job come in recently and I believe that having the CTSP is one of the reasons they looked at me and enquired." This experience is supported by Phil Layden of Chevron Alarms who says: "It gives you that edge over other people. You can show that you're doing something within your industry to keep yourself at the top of your game."

Fundamentally, training and wider professional and personal development is about being able to do the job you are tasked to do with confidence and to the highest possible standard, using the right tools, techniques and latest thinking. It is first and foremost an investment in your future. The qualifications, accreditations, certifications and endorsements from satisfied customers and employers that follow are what builds a strong reputation for you as an individual, the company you represent and ultimately the security sector as a whole ●

Sarah Hayward-Turton, Director of Sales & Marketing at the Linx International Group, is a future leader of the security industry. With her on-going support of ASIS UK's Young Professionals she's an integral part of the sector.

MSc graduates will quickly appreciate the benefits of successfully completing specialist security training



Picture credit: Linx International Group