CompTIA | CyberNow Labs
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CASE STUDY:

From "In Flux" to "In Demand": How CyberNow Labs and CompTIA Help Refugees Transform Their Futures with Cybersecurity

For newcomers to a country, finding gainful employment and a sense of purpose can be among the biggest challenges. CyberNow Labs has an ambitious goal of helping thousands of refugees and immigrants make more successful transitions into the workforce by discovering and mastering the fundamentals of cybersecurity. Through their successful program, and using industry-recognized CompTIA learning solutions, CyberNow Labs has helped countless refugees not just find jobs, but transform their lives and futures.

THE CHALLENGE: Many refugees arriving in Europe face a wide range of challenges; from difficulty learning local languages to struggles finding sustainable employment in a new place. However, there's one field that holds great promise for helping them transcend both. A career in cybersecurity can transform a person from any background or education level into a sought-after worker with a skillset that nearly every company wants and needs, while giving them deep potential for upward social mobility. In the U.S., for example, an entry level cybersecurity worker can expect to earn between $65,000 and $95,000 USD annually. An added bonus? Cybersecurity workers, regardless of their native tongue, learn to communicate in a language that transcends grammar and spoken words as they gain the competencies and skills needed to secure an organisation's digital presence. For U.S.-based CyberNow Labs, helping people find opportunities in cybersecurity in both Europe and the U.S. fulfills the ultimate "double bottom line". It can help individuals integrate into the workforce in their new home country or start a new career, and it can help companies fill critical skill and competency gaps on their IT teams. In the long run, when organisations like CyberNow Labs create opportunities in cybersecurity, they are also helping to create a stronger and safer IT sector at a time when risks and vulnerabilities are rampant.

In 2018, CyberNow Labs launched its first cohort of seven students with the idea of helping individuals who had no IT background get into cybersecurity. The Europe-America Contingent joint training program was launched, with priority given to individuals who speak at least one foreign language at a high level. Participants in the program come from a wide array of countries, professional backgrounds and education levels. "Only 5% of the trainees who have entered our program have a direct IT background," explain co-founders Hasan Eksi and Omer Arslan.

So how can a small team help people with no background in cybersecurity learn enough to become employable in a matter of five months?

For CyberNow Labs, it comes down to individual motivation as much as to the right combination of training and unique learning solutions that leverage an enterprise-grade SOC environment and 'SOC Days" graduate requirement. They get to work like a SOC Analyst to become one" Eksi explains.

THE SOLUTION: Given their deep familiarity with cybersecurity, Eksi, Arslan and team started out using their own custom-built resources to form the basis of their multilingual training programs. But they soon realised the value that CompTIA solutions could add to the program, given the platform-agnostic attributes of CompTIA learning materials, the solid learn-

"We have teachers, nurses, Uber drivers, former military personnel, veterans and NATO members. It's not about their experience, it's about whether they want to change their careers, or not, and make transitions in their lives. If someone is making $15 an hour but wants to make $40, they can do that. Anyone who has the aptitude and positive attitude can succeed," Arslan (left) and Eksi (right) share.

"The number one challenge we've seen with students is the time commitment," says Arslan. "People are busy with their lives and it's very intensive. We tell them that for five months you'll live and breathe cybersecurity and that's the only way it will work out. That excitement gets them through, but beyond that, it can be challenging. We have roughly 5% of people drop out, but the rest complete in twenty weeks."

Given the challenges around building and keeping motivation high among students, having the right learning solutions is a big factor in CyberNow Labs' success.

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Headquartered in the Washington D.C. metro area, National Cyber Group offers cyber security workforce development and talent solutions by combining the forces of America's most-known name in foundational IT certificatioxn training, Total Seminars, and the most hands-on cyber training program, CyberNow Labs, with new job placement and staffing solutions to attract, train and transmit thousands of career-seekers into entry-and-mid-level jobs as the nation's 'Elite Cybersecurity Corps.'

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THE SOLUTION & RESULTS (cont'd):

ing design that maximises student engagement, and the industry recognition of the CompTIA credentials. The team switched to using CompTIA Security+ and also opted to become a CompTIA delivery partner. They then obtained partner pricing for the refugee communities in Europe, who are able to use CompTIA vouchers to become certified at no individual cost. "The topics that CompTIA Security+ covers are well-known in the industry, and HR folks like to see it on a resume. It helps get you to the interview; no questions. And as for the hands-on component of the learning experience? There's not much competition out there," Eksi says.

Regardless of whether they are in a U.S. or a European cohort, students work incrementally through the CyberNow program, learning in a synchronous online format, unlocking the basics through CompTIA Security+, and later working on real-world cybersecurity tasks that test their knowledge at every step.

"We give them the same tasks as if they were working at IBM or Cisco," Arslan shares.

The CyberNow Labs program also takes a methodical approach to ensuring every topic can be comprehended to the fullest. "We spend time on every single topic in great detail, and we spread out the content of a course that might typically be crammed into a four-day day bootcamp into eight weeks, allowing students the proper time to digest and practice so they can hit the ground running on day one in their new jobs. We use the same tools, the same environment as a CSOC, and then we work with them on preparing for the job search process, including a structured mentorship program, that puts them to work. In that way, it's very similar to an apprenticeship program."

Given its strong academic framework, the CyberNow program was readily accredited by the job's centers in Germany, meaning graduates in the German cohorts are able to use what they've learned to get assistance in finding gainful employment.

Some four years into its existence, CyberNow Labs has helped hundreds of people in Europe and the U.S. through the program and has led to immeasurable improvements in the lives of their graduates. "CompTIA plus CyberNow together can build the perfect combination for a cyber analyst," Eksi attests. "We had a student join at the age of 55 after a career in NATO who is now working as a security engineer for Ebay. Another woman was a cashier at Walmart and is now working as a security engineer for a government contractor. There are hundreds of transformational stories just like these."

In total, CyberNow has seen a remarkable 85% placement rate among its graduates who have completed the program and actively searched for a job over the course of six months. At any given time, they have as many as 350 students in their cohorts and are growing bigger by the month. **"We set a target that in three years, we'd like to graduate 10,000 prepared cyber analysts who can hit the ground running on day one," say Eksi and Arslan. "That's our mission."**