



Leadership Through Innovation: The Emergence of the Virtual CISO



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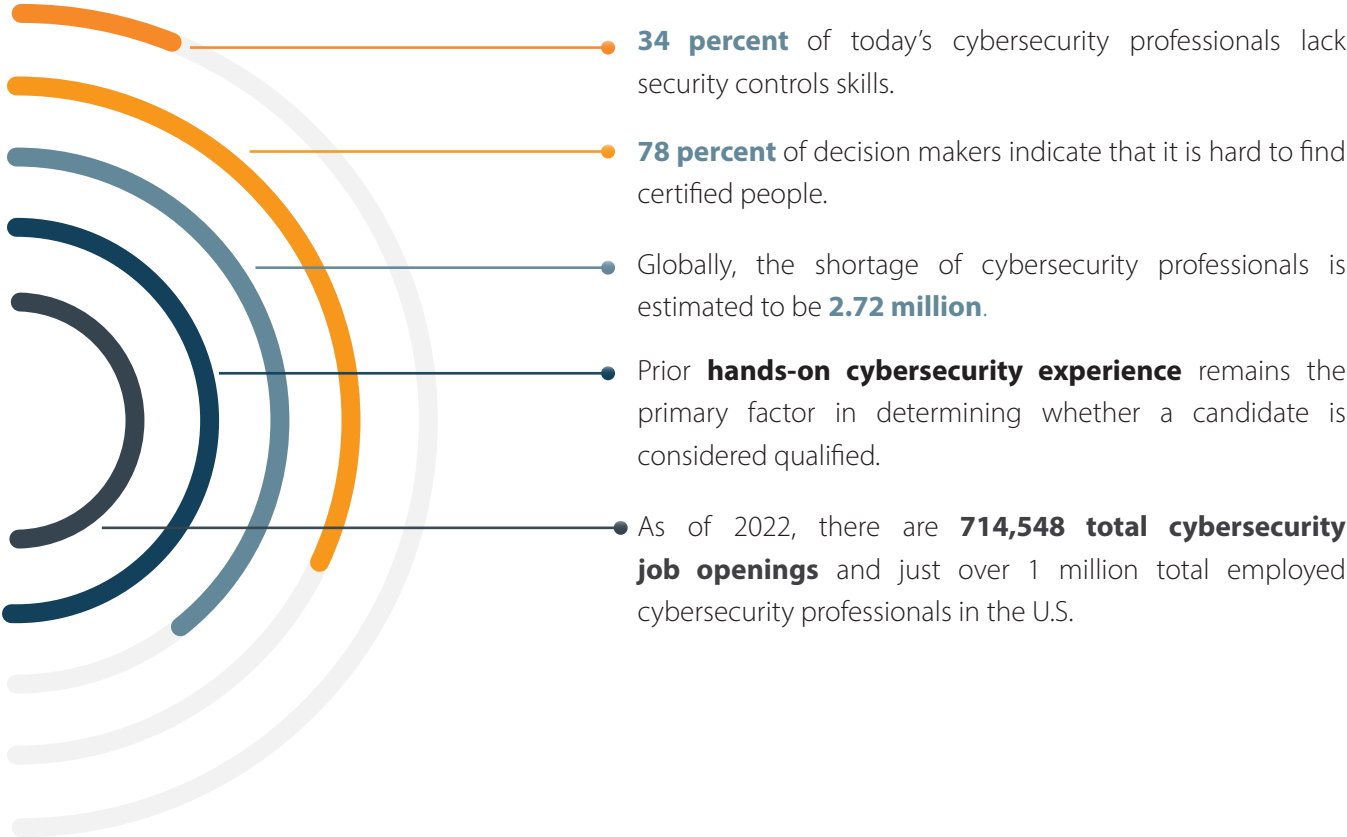
INTRODUCTION



The explosive growth of cybercrime forces businesses of all sizes to dedicate more resources to IT security and compliance. Even if money is no object, businesses are faced with a global shortage of skilled cybersecurity experts, creating a demand for innovative solutions. This is where the concept of a virtual Chief Information Security Officer (vCISO) comes in. A vCISO is a security professional or group of security professionals contracted to provide support in creating, maintaining, and updating an organization’s security posture, but with an as-needed involvement structure, and at a much cheaper cost than a full-time Chief Information Security Officer (CISO).

Increasing salaries of security professionals and worsening cybercrime continue to push small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) further behind in maintaining a strong security posture. For many SMBs, working with a vCISO can enhance security and regulatory compliance, protect data, and foster a culture of security awareness at a fraction of the cost.

2023 Cybersecurity Workforce Demand Statistics¹



DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A CISO AND A vCISO



It should be noted that the overall goals of CISOs and vCISOs are the same, but there are significant differences between the two models:

CISO

- ▶ **Salary based**— Traditionally, CISOs are highly skilled professionals who demand a high salary (well over \$150,000 annually). CISOs may also receive health insurance, retirement plans, and stock options within the business, leading to increased costs that can add up quickly for smaller organizations.
- ▶ **Heavily involved**— A CISO is, essentially, a full-time employee and responsible for managing most, if not all, security initiatives across the enterprise. They work closely with the IT department on a daily basis and are heavily involved in long-term security initiatives and planning for the organization.
- ▶ **Bigger responsibilities**— CISOs are responsible for managing multiple operations throughout the enterprise. This can include managing the security team, overseeing security operations, ensuring compliance with regulations, conducting risk assessments, incident response planning, and identifying and mitigating threats, among others.

If you have valuable and sensitive information within your environment, you need an information security program in place, meaning you need someone at the helm driving the program forward and steering the vision, strategy, and implementation to meet the organization's information security objectives.²

vCISO

- ▶ **Hourly rate structure**— vCISOs typically charge an hourly rate (usually between \$150 - \$500 an hour) with a minimum number of required hours or a retainer fee that is much more affordable than a full-time CISO's salary, resulting in huge cost savings for SMBs.
- ▶ **As-needed involvement**— vCISOs provide a range of services, just as a CISO does, but can operate on an as-needed basis or be on call for specific security responsibilities. Additionally, because vCISOs work with multiple clients, they can often provide access to a diverse pool of expertise, and a different perspective on the organization's security efforts.
- ▶ **Flexibility**— The needs of an organization fluctuate. The vCISO model makes it easy for SMBs to scale their vCISO services up or down, depending on their needs. vCISOs can provide the flexibility of adding or removing services without the hassle of hiring or firing full-time employees.³

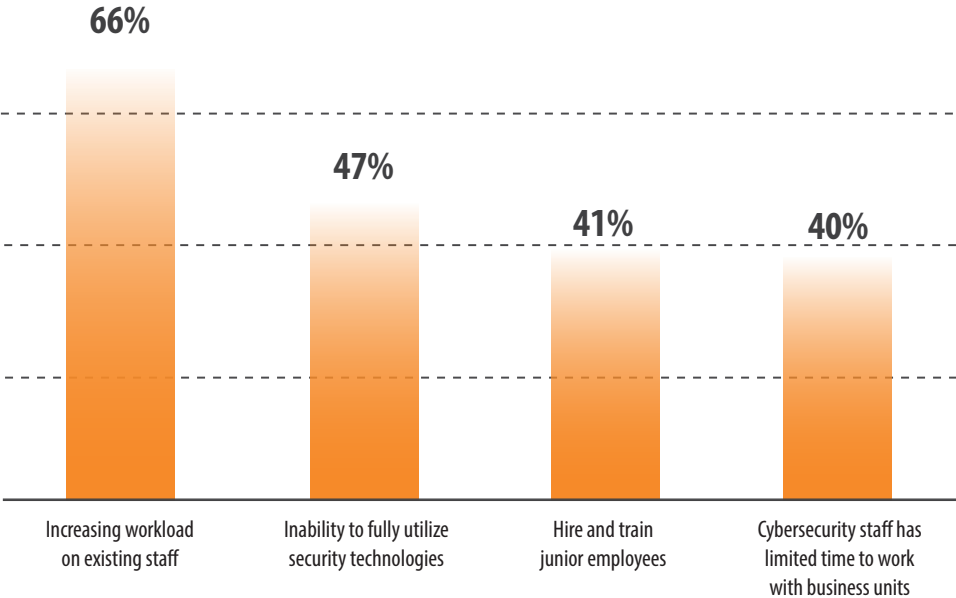
CHALLENGES: THE HIGH COST OF SECURITY



Too Many Hats

Large corporations have the ability to hire teams of experts to manage each component of their sprawling IT infrastructures. SMBs, on the other hand, employ smaller teams, requiring individuals to have diverse experience and wear many hats within the organization. The diversified skills approach to staffing works well for traditional IT software and systems management, but not for cybersecurity. Many SMBs try to meet their security needs by distributing security, risk, and compliance duties across their existing staff or reassigning someone as the “expert.” These methods are ill-suited for protection against bad actors, who have endless time and resources at their disposal.

How Organizations are Being Affected by the Cybersecurity Skills Shortage⁴



Inadequate Budgets

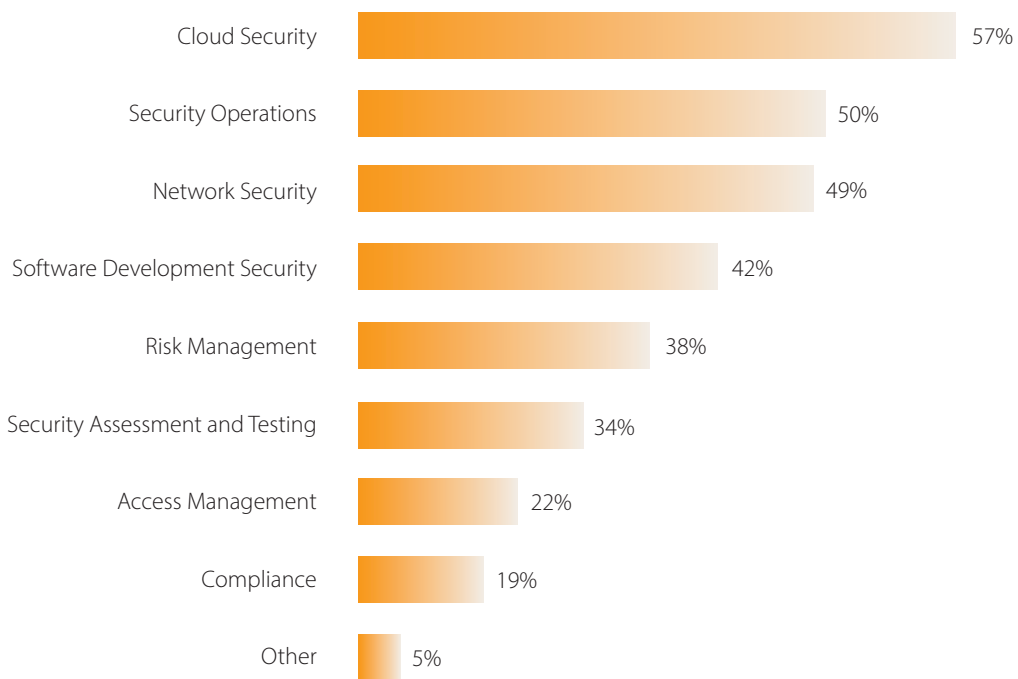
While large organizations and SMBs face similar risks, large enterprises have the financial resources to hire and retain highly skilled security experts. The market salary for qualified IT professionals is continually rising, pricing SMBs out of the hiring market. Additionally, even if a smaller business has adequate funds, many SMB owners believe that they are too small to be targeted, and end up not budgeting any funds towards cybersecurity initiatives, leading to larger cyber insurance payouts and remediation costs that the business cannot afford when a cyberattack does happen. Many SMBs end up going under after a single cyberattack.

Not Enough Experience

The competencies required to provide leadership and guidance at an executive level are not easy to attain. The leadership component requires a candidate with the capacity to persuade and interact with a variety of stakeholders, drive change, integrate security initiatives with business objectives, and provide strategic foresight. The cybersecurity component demands knowledge of numerous technology solutions, a deep understanding of regulatory issues, and experience assessing and managing risk.

The global cybersecurity staff shortage does not help, either. While the security workforce is growing rapidly, demand is growing even faster. (ISC)²'s cybersecurity workforce gap analysis revealed that despite adding more than 464,000 workers in the past year, the cybersecurity workforce gap has grown more than twice as much, with a 26 percent year-over-year increase, making it a profession in dire need of more people.⁵

What are the Hardest Cybersecurity Roles to Fill?⁶



The cybersecurity manpower shortage is becoming a more recognizable problem as companies come to grips with the reality of cyberattacks. These aren't just big names that are covered by the media; they are businesses next door that might have already become a statistic of cybercrime.⁷

The bottom line is that SMBs need to maximize results and minimize costs. Fortunately, SMBs can take advantage of innovative vCISO services that deliver solutions designed to fit their needs and budgets. Investing in qualified cybersecurity leadership is a proven way to reduce the costs and likelihood of a data breach.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A vCISO



Collaboration

The relationship between a vCISO and a client is collaborative. Companies need to select the proper level of service for their business needs and integrate the vCISO with other members of the executive team to gain the most value from the service. Continuous collaboration is one of the ways in which a vCISO differs from a consultant brought in to advise a company on specific projects and initiatives.



Works Directly with Leadership and Decision-makers

The vCISO should have sponsorship from the CEO, CIO, or IT Director and work directly with other executives. As with a traditional CISO, the vCISO should not report to mid-level managers or others who are not authorized to set company-wide policies.

Executive-level

vCISOs should function like other executives by:

- ▶ Attending executive meetings
- ▶ Providing strategic planning and budget guidance
- ▶ Developing policies and programs
- ▶ Preparing annual reports
- ▶ Fulfilling other commitments as necessary



The exact menu of services will vary depending on which vCISO firm is hired and how the individual contract is written.



Affordable, yet Effective

vCISOs provide strategic leadership to guide SMB's cybersecurity efforts at an affordable cost. Firms offering these services have a range of pricing levels to suit businesses of varying sizes and their unique needs. Some offer annual or quarterly plans, where price is determined by the level of service required by the client organization. Others offer on-demand services packaged in hourly bundles to be used within a specified period of time.



Adaptability

The high degree of flexibility, subject matter expertise, and executive leadership makes vCISO services ideal for the changing needs of SMBs.

Vetting a vCISO

A vCISO should have the same level of knowledge, expertise, and leadership experience as a traditional CISO. Look for individuals or firms with these qualifications:



A vCISO helps organizations strategize, plan, and execute a robust information security program, combining the vision of executive leadership along with the organization's unique security objectives into a cohesive, actionable plan.

CONCLUSION



No More Security Exclusivity

The rising costs of hiring cybersecurity experts will force some SMBs to operate without access to the skills and expertise necessary to protect data and reputations. Working with a vCISO allows those businesses to benefit from executive cybersecurity leadership without incurring the cost of hiring a full-time employee. It is a smart solution to a difficult and expensive problem.

Securance has built a reputation helping businesses across a variety of industries manage risk and compliance, enhance information security, and improve operations. To receive more information about how our vCISO services can help your organization, [contact us](#) today.

ABOUT SECURANCE



Securance has more than two decades of experience helping organizations combat evolved cyber threats, build effective risk management programs, align with compliance standards, and increase operational efficiency. Our comprehensive approach integrates proven methodologies, dependable expertise, and each customer's unique requirements to maximize the benefits and long-term value of each assessment.



SOURCES



1. https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2022/07/06/NICE%20FactSheet_Workforce%20Demand_Final_20211202.pdf
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13916 Monroes Business Park, Suite 102, Tampa, FL 33635 • 877.578.0215
www.securanceconsulting.com

