

Redefining Cybersecurity Talent

Why MBC is Prioritizing Attitude Over Technical Expertise in Hiring

MBC Group is a leading media and entertainment conglomerate in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Founded over 30 years ago, it operates 13 free-to-air (FTA) TV channels, three radio stations, and SHAHID—the region's leading over-the-top (OTT) streaming platform. MBC reaches audiences worldwide, with approximately 150 million weekly viewers across the MENA region. Aus Alzubaidi, Group CISO, redefines what makes a successful cybersecurity professional. MBC faces the challenge of securing a complex media ecosystem that includes satellite TV channels, streaming services, and 24/7 news operations. This diverse environment has led Alzubaidi to fundamentally rethink how the organization approaches cybersecurity talent.

Alzubaidi, who has been with MBC for nearly two decades, has witnessed a dramatic evolution in the organization's approach to cybersecurity talent. "A couple of years ago, it was 70 percent technical expertise, 30 percent attitude and cultural fit. Today, we're approaching 25-75, where 75 percent of the profile is always about the attitude," he explains. This shift reflects a growing recognition that while technical skills can be taught, characteristics like adaptability, agility, agency, and eagerness to learn are fundamental for a successful cybersecurity professional.

The changing cybersecurity landscape at MBC mirrors broader industry trends. As a publicly listed company, MBC must navigate complex regulatory requirements. "Fifteen years ago, we wouldn't dream of having a CISO function," Alzubaidi reflects. "Today, we operate across multiple public clouds, allowing us to expand our

footprint beyond the legacy on-premises perimeter. You don't have a DMZ anymore. You cannot rely on VPN alone anymore. Cybersecurity should always be a big focus if your workloads are everywhere, your services are everywhere, and you are serving hundreds of millions of customers and viewers. It's the core of the business to be digitally native and savvy at the same time."

Bridging Academia and Industry

Recognizing the global cybersecurity skills gap, which is estimated to be 3 million professionals, Alzubaidi is actively addressing the challenge. He serves as an advisory board member for several Middle Eastern universities, including the American University of Sharjah and University of Wollongong in Dubai. "Most university curriculums, whether undergraduate, master's, or PhD, lag behind industry needs," he observes. "If I could go back in time, I'd push deans of computer science and engineering to engage earlier with industry leaders like Microsoft, Amazon, Cisco, Palo Alto, and Google. Students need exposure to real-world challenges before graduating."

Instead of solely hiring experienced professionals, MBC invests heavily in fresh talent. The company maintains strong ties with university alumni offices and runs comprehensive internship programs. "Seven out of ten times, I've hired interns as full-time employees," Alzubaidi shares. But this strategy comes with its challenges. "Quite often the Finance team asks, 'You've spent a fortune on training programs, only to see competitors poach our best talent.' It's a risk we accept," he says. "Retaining talent is just as important as developing it."



Aus Alzubaidi
CISO @ MBC Group

Innovative Retention Strategies

This reality has pushed MBC to develop innovative approaches to talent retention that go well beyond competitive compensation. The organization has embraced modern working arrangements, recognizing that today's cybersecurity professionals value flexibility and autonomy as much as financial rewards. "People don't want to be monitored and micromanaged," Alzubaidi explains. "Instead, at MBC, we accept flexible working hours and work from anywhere."

Performance management is based on outcomes, not hours clocked. "We assess employees quarterly based on targets achieved, not on how many hours they sit in the office," he says. This is especially crucial for cybersecurity teams, who often work after-hours responding to incidents. "If I expect you to work overnight or on weekends, I need to offer flexibility in return."

"Today, 75 percent of the candidate's profile is about attitude, not technical expertise."

Rather than centralizing all security functions, MBC is taking steps to integrate security practices across the organization. "Instead of centralizing cybersecurity in one unit, we are trying to federate cybersecurity and democratize the practice, whenever possible," Alzubaidi explains. This approach includes embedding security best practices into daily operations across all technical teams—DevOps, storage, network, and cloud engineers. "Security isn't just the CISO's job. It needs to be embedded early in the development process before releasing the product to the market."

Transforming Recruitment Practices

MBC has overhauled its hiring approach, strengthening collaboration between IT and HR. "Ten years ago, hiring was a rigid process: IT wrote job descriptions, sent them to HR, and waited for candidates. That doesn't work anymore," Alzubaidi says. Today, IT teams provide cybersecurity training to recruiters, helping them understand modern tech stacks and security frameworks. "We explain concepts like 'shift left' security and cloud protection in simple terms, so HR can better assess candidates," he notes. "I also have direct access to our LinkedIn recruitment account, so I can fine-tune job descriptions myself. It's a very collaborative effort."

While diversity remains a priority, Alzubaidi acknowledges industry-wide challenges, particularly gender representation. "Out of all our IT and cyber engineering resources pool, I would say today less than 20 percent are women," he notes, attributing this partly to traditional academic pathways. "We need to do more to encourage women into cybersecurity roles."

Looking ahead, Alzubaidi emphasizes that cybersecurity must go beyond technology. "Cyber professionals must understand business strategy. It's not just about firewalls and compliance—it's about protecting business value."

By fostering industry-academic partnerships, modernizing recruitment, and prioritizing flexible work arrangements, MBC is building a sustainable model for cybersecurity talent. "It's not just about salary and bonuses," Alzubaidi concludes. "It's about creating an environment where professionals can grow, contribute meaningfully, and achieve a real work-life balance."

This Case Study is Just the Beginning – Download the 2025 Cybersecurity Workforce Research Report for More Insights!

This case study is part of the *2025 Cybersecurity Workforce Research Report* published by SANS | GIAC. Informed by international survey results, the report delivers key insights on how HR and Cybersecurity Managers can collaborate to successfully build high-performing cybersecurity teams.

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