Interview with Mr. Radu LEONTE

Mr. Radu LEONTE is an ICT professional with a career profile spanning technical and management roles, from Network Operations to Managed Services in Information Security. His excellent communications and inter-personal skills, strong analytical abilities and a desire to succeed drove Secureworks Romania to be an organization with more than 250 Information Security Professionals. His experience in multicultural environments, technical and organizational changes is highly appreciated. Radu is highly customer centric and driven by challenges such as managing high pressure for fast delivery of projects. Six Sigma/Lean philosophy are concepts that he adopted and applied and with the ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) mindset as reference paradigm for main operational processes and activities, he is on the right track to building the largest SCoE (Security Center of Excellence) in the Eastern Europe.

1. What is the SCoE that you and your leadership team are building?

The SecureWorks Security Center of Excellence Romania is a global delivery center for various security services (SOC Incident Analysis, Incident Response, Security Platform Management, Vulnerability Management and Pen-testing, Security Program Management, etc.) It is also the biggest security professionals' community in Romania where both people eager to start a career in the InfoSec industry and senior specialists can find an exciting job opportunity and build a long term career path.

2. What would be the benefit of having such a SCoE in Bucharest, Romania?

I would say the benefits are mutual, both from employer and employee perspective. On one hand, our company plans a sustainable business growth based on the IT&C talent pool available in Bucharest. On the other hand, Information Security is a quite new industry, there are a lot of passionate people interested to start a career in this area and we can offer all of them the opportunity to learn, grow and develop as security professionals in various specific roles. Romania starts to become an interesting option for companies looking to create or expand their global security operations and the current players on the local market are the best evidence that our country could be a top choice destination for new security centers.

3. Apart from building largest SCoE in Eastern Europe what else do you plan on?

With more than 200 security professionals, we are already the biggest security center in Eastern Europe. We achieved this status in only 3 years as we started the

operations in early 2014 and I dare to say that if we keep the same growth rate, we will become the biggest security center in Europe before 2020.
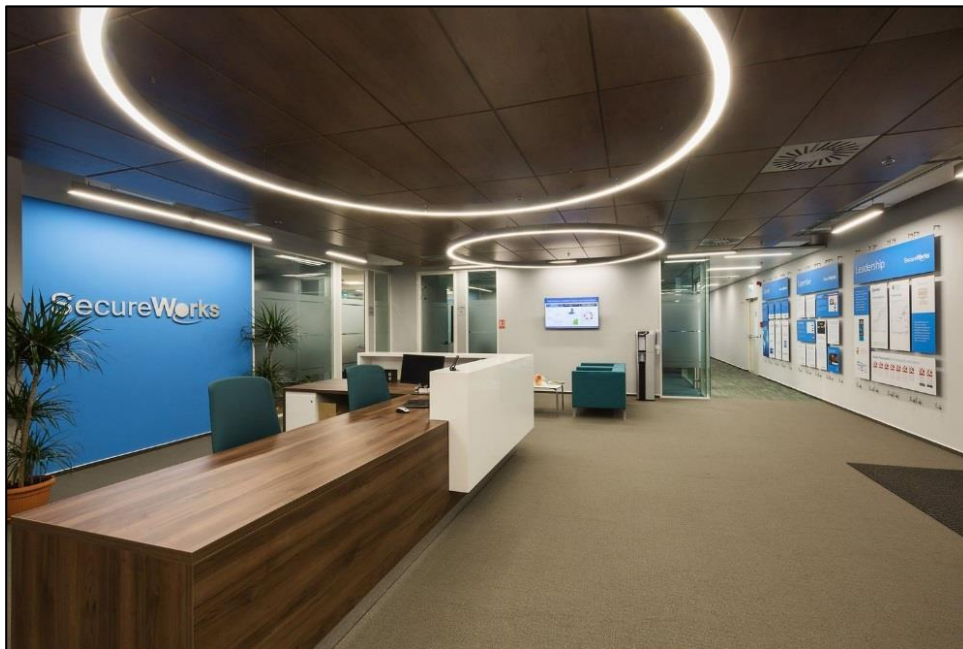
The new SecureWorks facility in Bucharest, 2017
Image source: Alexandru Bobulescu, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/check-out-new-secureworks-facility-bucharest-alexandru-bobulescu

Of course, besides the headcount it is also very important to be number one in terms of competences and the quality of our services. Currently, we deliver more than 10 various security roles and we're continuously creating and developing new competences. We plan to continue our business development by hiring the best professionals available on the local market, by becoming a regional employer and start hiring security professionals from other European countries. In the same time, we want to be the Number 1 employer option for all Romanian security specialists currently working abroad and looking to return home sooner or later, but also for any fresh graduate eager to start a career in information security.

4. Cyber-attacks are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Are you worried about the evolution of cybercrime?

Regardless of how worried we are or not, the trend is very clear and we are moving fast to a new era where IoT, e-banking, cloud and virtualization will be a dominant part of our life. Of course, cybercrime will continue to exist and create damages and will require an increased effort and focus to fight against. But looking at how many players and new tools and solutions appear every day, how the cybercrime law and regulation evolves, how much investment is made in creating specialists and counter measures, I am pretty confident the cybercrime will be better controlled and diminished in the future.

5. One of the latest trends is the use of cloud computing technology, allowing companies to outsource data and applications to virtual platforms. What kind of advantages will have the Romanian companies if they use this technology?

According to various studies related to cloud adoption, security is one of the top concerns for CIO (Chief Information Officers) for migrating their services to the cloud. For example, a study conducted by ChangeWave Research in April 2014 identified security concerns as being the leading reason why both large companies (more than 1000 employees) and small- to medium-sized companies (fewer than 1000 employees) are not moving to the cloud. Apart of the obvious operational cost efficiency reason, there could be also a benefit from security posture increase perspective. Data in cloud could be more secured that on premise and companies that don't have a mature security framework can benefit by outsourcing the mission to protect and preserve their digital assets to the cloud operator and other specialized service providers like us.

6. What are the blockers / advantages you identify in running your business from Romania (reputation, skills)?

Lacking skills is definitely a roadblock but not something that cannot be solved. This is currently a global pain and the shortage of good professional is well-known by anyone working in this domain. However, we have a strong differentiator that helps us to sort out this problem: Romanian people are extremely eager to compete, learn and to develop their competences. In addition, the passion for the job, seriousness, reliability and the ability to align and embrace different cultures are a mix of qualities that overcome this obstacle. Putting together in the same team good competences and skills with passion, right attitude and a strong desire to succeed is the "secret recipe" for building up a center of excellence. In conclusion, very good knowledge and also passion and enthusiasm for security are equally appreciated by us.

7. How important do you think cyber security education is and who should provide it (self-driven, company funded, schools)?

Unfortunately, the information security profile - no matter if we talk about a process oriented role or a more technical one, is something that requires several years of hands-on and continuous learning and certification effort. No fresh graduate is prepared for an information security role despite the fact this new field has caught the attention in the academic world and some interesting master programs are currently run by some universities. In order to start a career as a security engineer/specialist, having several years of previous IT experience with exposure to different roles and technologies is a prerequisite. To make it even more complicated, the learning process never stops in this field. Therefore, focusing on creating and increasing competences rather than buying them is the key. SecureWorks Romania invests a lot in training and certification programs. For example, since the center opening until now, our staff acquired more than 700 certifications and our current certification acquisition rate is 1 new certification per working day. However, due to our massive expansion that comprises also junior roles, we started from this year an Internship Program aimed for fresh graduates and junior IT specialists. The program is paid and is composed of one month classroom training based

and two months hands-on/shadowing on live operations. So far the program proved to be a success and we intend to run a new one at every 3-4 months.

8. What do you think should be the role of the academic environment in cybersecurity?

I think the role of the academic environment is crucial for leveraging the cybersecurity potential and capabilities. This new industry has a significant demand for specialized workforce and the university benches should provide candidates with better security skills. Of course, the partnership with companies from the information security field is mandatory requirement for developing some good hands-on skills and we are open to any related collaboration. In the end, Romania IT market should shift from some low profile outsourced jobs like call center representatives towards higher valued consultant oriented roles.

9. Does your company collaborate with other organizations (companies, institutions)?

In the last 2 years, SecureWorks Romania has partnered and sponsored some big security events organized in Bucharest and Sibiu. We will continue to collaborate with different local institutions in order to increase the information security awareness across Romanian IT community and identify passionate people that sooner or later will become part of our family. Five months ago we moved into a new office where we have built a training facility and now we are working to implement a strong and complex virtual lab environment. Once this training facility will be completed, we will start organizing various training sessions and we will invite all our partners and collaborators to attend.

10. What would you advice a young graduate?

I would strongly advice any fresh graduate with a curious mind to start a career in the information security field. It is a very interesting domain where you don't have time to get bored. Something new appears in the cybercrime war field every single day. New types of attacks, new tools, new actors, new vulnerabilities and new technologies require a continuous learning effort. From personal professional development perspective, there is also an excellent opportunity to build your career. Information security is an industry with an aggressive growth forecast, with more job opportunities than available specialists on the market and where unemployment rate will continue to remain negative for at least the next 10 years. The opportunity to start a successful career is next to you, seize it and ride the wave!

Interview conducted by Gabriel PETRICĂ
RAISA - Romanian Association for Information Security Assurance