Remarkable Journey of an Ethical Hacker – 7 Cyber Certifications in less than 6 months

Jakub Stankiewicz
Junior Offensive Security Expert at Smarttech247

In this edition of our success story, we share the inspirational journey of Jakub Stankiewicz, one of the elite members of the Smarttech247 Offensive Security Team. His story has been nothing less than extraordinary. At the age of only 24, Jakub earned some of the highly esteemed certifications in the field of offensive security. However, what is more fascinating is Jakub's hard work and determination, which earned him 7 major certifications in just 6 months. Jakub is a Junior Penetration Tester at Smarttech247 and holds certifications in **BSCP** (Burp Suite Certified Professional), **CPTS** (Certified Penetration Testing Specialist), **CBBH** (Certified Bug Bounty Hunter), **OSWE** (OffSec Web Expert), **OSWA** (OffSec Web Assessor), **OSWP** (Offensive Security Wireless Professional), and **OSCP** (Offensive Security Certified Professional). While qualified experts often take multiple attempts to pass these certifications, Jakub completed most of them on his first try. This is a pure testament to Jakub's expertise, skill, and hard work, showcasing the quality of talent that Smarttech247 boasts!

In our session with Jakub, we had the opportunity to dig deeper and gain more insights into his 'happening' life as a Pentester. What we uncovered was a pure passion and love for the field. During his early high school years, Jakub discovered the field of Ethical Hacking, sparking his interest in those early days. Jakub describes himself as a '*curious young man in high school,*' but limited access to knowledge and technology was the biggest obstacle for him in kickstarting his career as an ethical hacker.

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Jakub shares moments of difficult days, saying, "When I was young, I had no access to a PC, and I tried reading 2 or 3 books, but I gave up as it was not a fun way for me to get into this field." Due to tough times, Jakub decided to pursue the field of programming and become a software developer, as the market was bigger and easier to break into.

However, his love for ethical hacking kept him coming back to new avenues in the cyber field. This time he discovered a new way of learning more about the field of ethical hacking through 'TryHackMe,' a platform where he learned the basics of cybersecurity. What started as a hobby after work hours for Jakub has now taken the shape of an aspiring professional career path. One key fact about Jakub that has helped him in his journey is his belief that knowledge is everywhere. Especially in this modern age, we have access to interactive resources and multiple delivery forms, allowing one to choose what one wants to learn and develop their skills in no time.

Although Jakub started as a professional programmer and pursued his career as a full-stack developer for 2 years, during this time, he kept learning cyber skills from every possible platform. In 2023, Jakub finally decided to break up from the programming world and enter the fascinating cyber industry. But very early, he realized that the industry operates through trust. His way of earning this trust and being recognized for companies and clients was through earning elite certifications that would truly validate his skill in the industry. Jakub mentions, "After 2 years of programming, I felt like I don't have as much fun as I had previously from that. So, a year ago in February, I decided that 2023 is the year to sharpen my security skills and make them official by doing some certifications."

Jakub walks us through his bittersweet journey of earning these certifications, and his experience is an epitome of continuous hard work, dedication, and perseverance. Starting from smaller certifications, Jakub earned his eJPT certification first to test the waters and went back into completing his Azure certifications (Fundamental and Developer). Jakub called this stint his 'Unfinished Business in the Programming World.' However, after this, he jumped straight back into the cybersec field and pursued his BSCP certification, which was when he saw his first low. Jakub describes his experience, saying, "I started from the basics and took it step by step. It was really fun, achieving things step by step, certificate by certificate. I saw progress almost every day, and I was growing every single day, although there were moments where I had true breakdowns, especially for my first Burp Suite certificate practitioner exam attempt, where I got 0 points. I was very upset, but I knew I couldn't give up. I went to try again the very next day, and finally passed on the 3rd attempt, which felt like a moment of big victory for me. It gave me so much confidence, and I was prepared to tackle my next certifications heads on."

The journey, however, only got intense, as Jakub had to juggle between his ongoing university over weekends and his preparation for 3 major certifications: OSWA, OSWP, OSWE. However, as finances were a big hurdle at the moment, Jakub used his time wisely and took on other available certifications at the time, including CPTS, CBBH, and OSCP. In this time, Jakub secured his well-deserved position as a Pentester with Smarttech247 and went on to complete his 3 other major certifications: OSWA, OSWP, and OSWE. Even through tiring and exhausting days, Jakub excelled in all his certifications and passed them all on his first attempt. Being a fast learner, especially in the field of cybersec, Jakub earned 7 certifications in less than 6 months, a true testament to the wealth of knowledge he carries and a true picture of the talent we have at Smarttech247.

Jakub talks about his time with Smarttech247 and tells us his journey as a Pentester in Smarttech247. "Smarttech247 has been my biggest milestone, and it has helped me gain invaluable commercial experience. Working within a real-life environment on real-time projects helped me learn so much, especially within a team of knowledgeable professionals. Every day I get to know something new as we have interesting topics of discussion. Smarttech247 helped me break the barrier from being a hobbyist to professional. For me, every real-time environment is a great learning opportunity. The team at Smarttech247 is very collaborative as well. My day is almost never the same; it revolves around the same concepts, but every day is a new challenge. In my experience, this is the best team I have worked with. They are very helpful, and the work culture is great. The surprising element for me was - we are great friends within the team, as opposed to other work cultures where there is little to no interaction. It feels like I work with a bunch of friends. Although I work 650 km away from the main office, I visit the team often, and we share a great bond. We are a bunch of problem solvers, and problem-solving sits at the core of our team value."

Speaking about his career goals, Jakub remains humble despite his great achievements and tells us that his passion drives him to achieve more every day. He says, "I don't set a lot of goals; I just focus on sitting and achieving things that I can do today, and that is a goal in itself. I carry a passion for what I do, and if you are passionate and there is some problem, there will be times when even sitting at the dinner table, you will be thinking about the solutions. Today, ethical hacking is not just what I like to do; it's something I get paid for, and the motivation therefore is even higher than before, to upskill and grow. I am fresh, I have a fresh look at problems, and that is very exciting for me."

In his free time, Jakub loves to play computer games but jumps straight back into the HackTheBox Platform when he is craving logical games. He believes that a gamified experience to learn cybersecurity is the future. When asked for advice for anyone willing to pursue the role of an ethical hacker, he says, "My biggest advice is, there is no magic sauce for anything; you just sit and do it. You should always try, even if you don't end up pursuing, you will have learned something valuable."

Jakub is currently pursuing his passion with Smarttech247 and is eyeing some of the more advanced certifications, including OSEP and OSED by early 2024. We at Smarttech247 are proud to nurture talents like Jakub, whose inspiring story will help and motivate all the bright minds!

Would you like to get in touch with one of our experts?

Contact Us - info@smarttech247.com