

CRACKING THE CODE

**INSIDER SECRETS TO
THRIVING AT
CYBERSECURITY EVENTS**

Foreword

How to leave cybersecurity events with more than business cards

Whether you're a new start-up seeking to stake your claim or an industry leader keeping your name in the game, cybersecurity industry events should be on your agenda. They offer a unique opportunity to get in front of multiple prospects and customers in one place, as well as rubbing shoulders with leading industry journalists and analysts.

But events are also extremely busy places. Time is at a premium and most people will have packed agendas. If you send in a team or set up a booth without planning or preparation, it's likely you'll be heading home with little to show for it but a hole in your marketing budget. From closing sales to making headlines, read on for industry insights and practical advice on how to come away from cybersecurity events feeling like a winner.



Robin Campbell-Burt
CEO Code Red



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Insights from an analyst:
Jarad Carleton: Global Market Research Director
for Cybersecurity at Frost & Sullivan



1 GET YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY RIGHT

Q&A with Gianna Whitver, Cybersecurity Marketing Society

What do you think is the biggest priority for anyone attending an event?

Think strategically and set goals. It's incredibly important, but something I see a lot of companies miss.

You get vendors going to these big events like RSA and Black Hat expecting to come home with hundreds of sales, but that might not be a realistic result for everyone. Unless you're an IBM or a Cisco or a Palo Alto, you aren't going to have attendees flocking over to see you.



**Are you looking for sales?
Or is the event a branding
exercise for you?**

All those people walking around won't have an intrinsic trust in you the same way they do for those big names that have put a lot of money into brand recognition for years.

On the other hand, it's an opportunity to get your name out in front of 20,000- 40,000 people, which is hugely valuable if you put the work in.

So, if you're a start-up or still in the early stages of growth, I'd advise you to think about it differently. Do you have the recognition to snag hundreds of sales over the event, or is this more of a branding exercise for you?

So, it's a case of expectation management?

Exactly. If you book a space at an event and the C-suites are going in thinking about how many leads and sales you'll close, it could lead to disappointment. Then everyone thinks the event was terrible, and the company doesn't bother going back.

But if you go in expecting it to be a branding exercise to build awareness, you can hit those goals and consider it to be a success even if you only come home with a handful of solid leads.

**Break it down into a math problem and put in
some realistic metrics to measure it.**

Speaking of people, how do you decide who to send?

This can be a tricky one for some companies. We see a lot of companies just decide to throw as many bodies as they can at big events. Get the entire sales team over there, and half the C-suite too. But with air travel, hotels, and food, that gets very expensive very quickly – especially when you're in a big city at a time when prices are high. So, you need to think carefully about whom you're sending and why.

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Q&A with Gianna Whitver, Cybersecurity Marketing Society cont...

Everyone needs to be trained on the expectations of the event and their role in it

Your attendees need to line up with your goals. If you're sending your sales team, perhaps consider setting a minimum number of meetings to be arranged before you start booking travel to make sure the ROI is there.

On the other hand, if one or two closed deals will pay for the event expenditure, is it worth going all out and sending your CEO in?

Whomever you send, you need to make sure they're ready to really work it. Everyone needs to be trained on the expectations of the event and their role in it.



At crowded cybersecurity events, attention is scarce, your booth, your team, and your outreach must work harder to earn it.

So how can smaller vendors stand out against the big names? What do you recommend that would help them get meetings booked?

It's hard to get attention and book meetings when you aren't a big name. There are a lot of potential prospects, but they don't know who you are. The biggest challenge is you don't necessarily know who exactly is attending.

If leads are the goal, events demand proactive sales outreach and a booth that actively pulls prospects in.

You can easily call up a few CISOs and security pros, find out if they're attending, and get some time with them. It might not bring the same ROI as securing some leads, but building your relationships is still valuable.

If leads are your main priority, your sales team needs to put in the work to proactively book in as many meetings as possible with existing prospects.

In terms of new prospects, you need to make your booth enticing to passers by. Attention is absolutely at a premium, so your booth needs to pop. Hold demos, offer free trials, and merchandise. Food and drink are always very popular – try and build a bit of a party atmosphere. And make sure your team has their game faces on all day – no one slacking off on their phones.

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As a smaller brand, how will you drive meetings and momentum before, during, and beyond the booth?

Book some meeting spaces, and some lunch tables at nearby restaurants. Either you can fill them with proactive meetings or take along prospects on the fly.

For example, there's a great Brazilian steakhouse called Fogo de Chão near to RSA, and the line is always out the door at lunchtime. Imagine how good it'll look when you and a prospect can breeze in past the line.

Organising a talk or a party (or both) also works well because you have a sign-up sheet of attendees. That lets you be more targeted and makes it less of a shot in the dark.

The worst thing you can do is just turn up with no strategy.

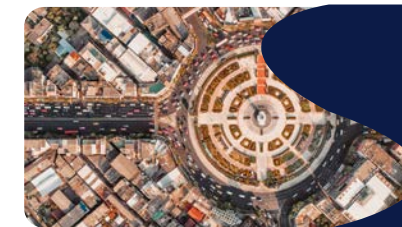
That's a surefire way to leave empty-handed.

Did Covid change the way events work? Do you still see an impact?

The pandemic definitely changed a lot of things. Everything had to go fully virtual for a while, but now physical events are back in force.

That said, although people are keen to be back in person, it's still harder to get as many people out compared to pre-2019. We heard from big events like Black Hat that their attendance was much lower in 2021 and 2022 than it used to be.

We're also in a difficult financial period right now, where a lot of companies have scaled back their budgets for travel, marketing, and so on.



Those who do attend will be more likely to be the people who wanted to be there.

One positive takeaway, though, those who do attend will be more likely to be the people who want to be there. We heard a lot of positive buzz from Black Hat last year about it being very valuable, even with the smaller number of attendees.

Whatever the turn-out, you need to make sure you arrive with a solid plan and the resources to carry it out if you hope to come away feeling successful.



Gianna Whitver

Gianna Whitver is the Co-Founder and CEO of the Cybersecurity Marketing Society and a co-host of the Breaking Through in Cybersecurity Marketing Podcast. As a Marketing Advisor, she lends her expertise to top cybersecurity and technology companies.

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MAKING HEADLINES WITH THE PRESS

Top Tips with Kim Smith, Client Services Director, Code Red

Set your goals

Much like the decision to focus on securing sales or building your brand, you need to have a clear idea of what you want to achieve with press outreach. Your end goals will shape your outreach strategy.

What do you want to achieve from a press outreach?

If you're a known industry quantity and want to make a splash for a new launch or industry research, you might aim for a larger number of shorter meetings to supplement press material.

If you're seeking to build your brand, you might prefer a smaller selection of longer, more in-depth interviews with your senior leadership.

Consider if you really need coverage to make the event a success, or if building up relationships for future press outreach will be valuable in its own right.

Events are a great chance to meet leading industry journalists face-to-face and improve your media relations

It also can be a great strategy to set up media interviews ahead of the event, sometimes under embargo. This will help you create a buzz before the main event, so that your prospects and clients hear about you beforehand. If successful, you'll automatically see more traffic driving up to your booth during the event, your brand will stand out amongst the noise.

Make sure there is a purpose

Sometimes getting press interviews at a trade show has no purpose other than to demonstrate to internal stakeholders that activity is happening. "The CEO is in town, so they need to have at least three press interviews lined up". However, trying to secure interviews for the sake of it will not wash with journalists and you will be passed over.

Every interview should have a purpose behind it. Put yourself in the journalist's shoes and ask yourself 'Why would I want to speak to this company? What new thing am I going to learn that my readers have to know about?'

Don't just do PR projects around an event; think about the long-term

One of the fatal mistakes that we've seen companies make in the past is that they just do PR projects around an event and then go quiet for the rest of the year. This doesn't foster meaningful journalist relationships and won't help the business achieve its goals from an event.

If a journalist already has a relationship with you, trusts you, and knows your value, they will be more likely to find the time to speak with you. Outreach that introduces you from scratch is a harder sell at an event - unless you have a really big hard news story to announce.

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Come armed with the right resources

Whatever your preferred outcome, make sure your team on the ground have everything they need to support it. If you're making new announcements, make sure there are press releases, research papers, and anything else relevant on hand. This goes for your team too – your spokespeople should be armed with briefing books that get them up to speed on the journalists, publications, and talking points for the interviews.

Get started early

Journalists are much in demand, and their time fills up fast. The sooner you can get in touch with your meeting pitch, the more likely you are to carve out a space in their diary. Having a prior relationship with key industry journalists helps tremendously here, letting you cut to the chase.

Be prepared, be flexible

Transport delays, illness, overrunning meetings. These things happen, and you need to be ready for them. Ensure you have a contingency plan for likely issues. If a journalist runs late and misses the meeting, be ready with a backup slot.

If your spokesperson falls prey to a stomach bug, have another representative up to speed. Importantly, you need to be flexible around the journalist's schedule rather than the other way around – you want them more than they want you.

Book a space

Think about where the interviews will take place. Most events have a press room, and if you're exhibiting, you can use your stand. This might do if you're planning a whirlwind tour of short interviews, but for longer meetings, it's nice to have a more comfortable and private space arranged.

So, make sure you have done your research and know where the good quiet areas are that are an easy walk from the venue.

If you're really keen to build relationships with certain key journalists, then offering to take them out for dinner can be a great way to network and interact.



**Kim Smith: Client Services Director
Code Red**

Kim has more than 17 years experience in PR and has worked with clients ranging from start-ups to established industry leaders. Bringing a deep understanding of both the industry and the stories that journalists want to tell.

**ALWAYS
HAVE A
PLAN B**

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CONNECTING WITH SECURITY ANALYSTS



Top tips from Kirsten Scott, Account Director, Code Red

For cybersecurity vendors, analyst relations provide an effective counterpart to press outreach and marketing efforts in helping to build awareness with your target audience. Speaking with analysts can help to boost your brand's credibility and reputation, especially if you feature in an industry report.

Here are a few tips to help you secure and maximise analyst briefings this year and beyond.

Research your targets

Some are more technical in nature like Black Hat, while others emphasize networking or business strategies, like the RSA Conference. This variety allows me to learn and gain insights from multiple perspectives, which is invaluable in staying up to date with the ever-evolving cybersecurity landscape.

Events are more conducive to organic conversations, introductions, and networking.

Prepare a focused pitch

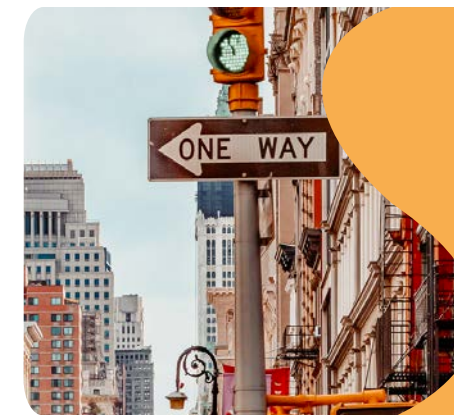
Cybersecurity analysts are much in demand, and their time is limited, so you need to make sure your pitch has a laser focus. You need to succinctly get across why your organisation is interesting and worth spending time meeting with.

What are your USPs? What challenges are your products helping to solve that no one else is? What interesting insights can you offer about industry trends? What are the benefits of meeting you in person rather than conducting a call or video chat?

Make the best of the in-person meeting

On that note, you need to make sure your spokespeople are fully prepped for the meeting when you get something secured.

Be ready to carry out a live demo of your solution if that's possible and come armed with physical and digital copies of any supplementary material such as reports.



Unlike a journalist interview, analysts will want to dive into all the details of your company and your product offering, so the more preparation the better.

A face-to-face cybersecurity analyst meeting requires more preparation than jumping on Zoom, too. Think about where the meeting will take place.

If you need to do a tech demo, is there a comfortable and quiet place at your booth? If it's more conversation led, have you considered booking a place nearby to eat?

Be sure to ask the analyst if they have a favourite spot (it makes for a good icebreaker too), and it's a smart move to book some pre-emptive slots at popular locations in advance.

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Don't neglect your follow up

Once the dust from the event has settled and everyone has headed for home, it's time to start building that relationship.

A quick follow up immediately after the event never goes amiss and you should be sure to keep in regular contact moving forwards with any developments they might appreciate such as significant product updates client wins, new research, and so on to keep them in the loop.

A successful face-to-face meeting will offer a great way to build your relationships, so be sure to make the best of it.



**Kirsten Scott: Account Director
Code Red**

Kirsten's real passion is creativity – combining her strong understanding of cybersecurity with the latest media trends to create truly compelling campaigns. Kirsten's unique ideas take her clients and their brands to the next level, connecting their messages with their audiences.

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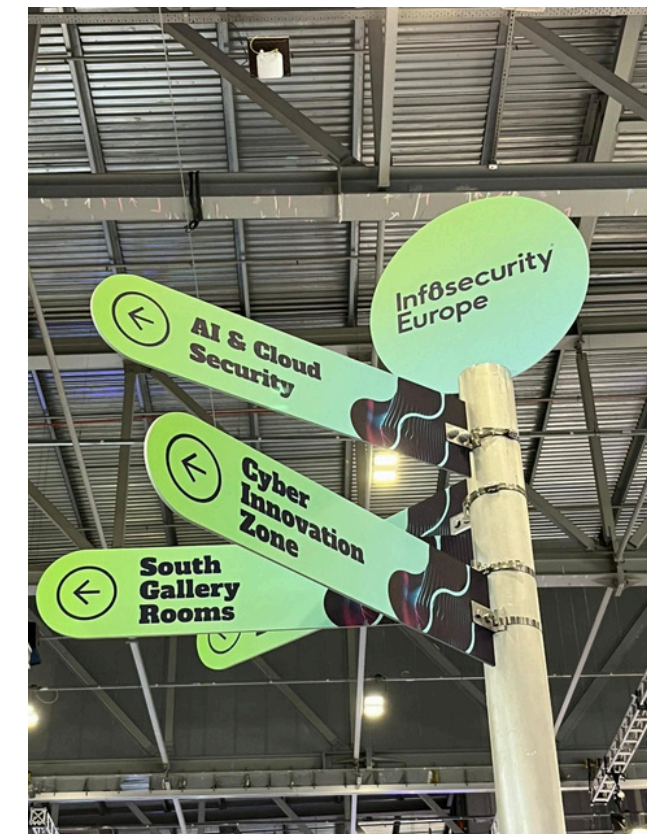
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ANALYST INSIGHTS

Insights from Jarad Carleton, Global Research Director, Frost and Sullivan

Analysts are like elephants; we remember executives who have burned us in the past.

The key is to tell the busy analyst the name of the company, the solution the company has, topic they want to talk about, and the executive's name and title.

All of those things help determine if we'll take a briefing because we have to determine:

- If the topic area is included in our research agenda, is close to it, or if it's in an area we are considering doing work in (but haven't publicly discussed it).
- If the executive is in a role to make a briefing worth our time (do we feel he/she has the breadth of knowledge to answer most of our questions?).
- Is the executive someone we already know from a previous company (an executive whom we've had good experiences speaking with, or was the executive rude, arrogant, or unprofessional in any other way, thus wasting our valuable time)?

Analysts are like elephants; we remember executives who have burned us in the past.

Analysts are like elephants; we remember executives who have burned us in the past. Many of us remember who treated us poorly and the stink of unprofessional behaviour follows those people across companies.

Executives who are rude and unprofessional to anyone in the analyst community are salting their professional fields for years into the future.



Jarad Carleton: Global Research Director at Frost & Sullivan

Jarad Carleton is currently the Global Research Director of the Cybersecurity Program at Frost & Sullivan. He has 23+ years of experience in global market research, analysis, project methodology development, international project management, & business development.

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How Code Red can help

Code Red is a leading cybersecurity PR and marketing specialist with over two decades of experience in securing incredible coverage and opportunities for our clients.

We can help you form your marketing strategy and collaborate to create fresh industry research and narrative agendas that tap into the pulse of the industry. And we'll put in the work to get those press and analyst meetings locked in. We know the top industry contacts and how they like to operate at events.

If you're planning to attend a cybersecurity event then please get in touch with the team:

