

Diverse cybersecurity solution aims to protect small business vulnerabilities

The huge number of businesses driven online in order to survive over the past 12 months has created a heightened need for efficient cybersecurity. Nadia Kadhim, CEO of Naq Cyber, has created a solution to help small businesses reduce the threat posed by hackers online.

What was your background before founding Naq Cyber?

I have a Bachelor's Degree in Law and a Master's in Public International Law with a specialisation in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which is more commonly known as the law of war. That sounds completely different to cybersecurity I know, but there's a logic to it.

During my Masters, I focused on IHL in relation to children's rights. This landed me my first job after university, where I focused on child protection as well as the implementation of the GDPR throughout our software and other business processes. This was my first introduction into privacy law, which wouldn't have

been my first choice, but in turn it has got me to where I am today; the CEO of a cybersecurity startup. I'm even able to use my knowledge of the law of war with regards to cybercrime tactics to understand the attacker's motivations and how they work.

What is Naq Cyber?

Naq Cyber is essentially a small business' information security officer. Our solution is an online platform specifically designed to ensure technical protection and legal compliance of SMEs. We are there to help small businesses protect sensitive information and systems. We focus on four key areas: Education & Awareness, Compliance & Documentation, Digital Security and Incident Response.

We target small to medium sized businesses in the professional services sector.

They are often in possession of a wealth of personal information from clients, employees and suppliers, but they don't know what to do or where to start when it comes to securing that data.

With our solution, we aim to make cybersecurity easy and accessible for our customers, who have been extremely underserved in the current market and sometimes feel overwhelmed when it comes to cybersecurity.

Our current customer base is very diverse; we work with lawyers, accountants and marketers to name a few. Our customers can choose between one of three monthly subscriptions to our platform, allowing them to find a solution that suits their specific size and needs.

What was the catalyst for launching Naq Cyber?

My cofounder, Chris, had been working for large companies mostly in the defence sector for a number of years as a cybersecurity contractor and as

such, he was working with an English accounting firm. One day, he asked his accountant what he did to secure his information, and his answer revealed that he knew he had to do something about it, but didn't really know where to start. That, combined with my knowledge of privacy law and implementing the GDPR in a small business, is how we came up with the idea for a complete cybersecurity solution for SMEs that really tackles their problems holistically.

We were so excited about being able to help small business owners and take away some of the worries, and we knew that there'd be a massive need for a product like ours.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

At the end of July 2020, we were one of six startups to be selected in the NCSC Cyber Accelerator program hosted in Cheltenham, UK. This was an amazing opportunity for us and the catalyst for launching the business. The accelerator program enabled us to define our value proposition, come up with a pricing strategy and detail our technical plans before we started developing our platform.

Late last year, we came up with our – to use startup lingo – “moonshot idea”; our ultimate goal. We want to include a marketplace as part of our platform, on which we will offer additional products and services from an extensive partnership network at a discounted price. Our platform will then be truly complete, helpful and even intelligent, as we will be using artificial intelligence to make suggestions to our clients for what add-ons they might need. We will be a one-stop-shop for cybersecurity and IT, making the process of securing your business easy and manageable.

How has COVID-19 impacted Naq Cyber?

Because COVID-19 lockdown measures drastically increased the amount of businesses working from home, cyber crime targeting SMEs has rocketed. Criminals were – and still are – taking advantage of increased security vulnerabilities to steal data, generate profits and cause disruption. This posed an opportunity for a cybersecurity business like ours to work to protect these small businesses. Once we were accepted into the NCSC accelerator in July, our development gained so much momentum that luckily, COVID has had minimal impact on Naq Cyber.

Cybersecurity is a male-dominated industry – what advice would you give to women interested in a career in cybersecurity?

Say yes to every opportunity that comes your way and don't underestimate the value of your network. Investing effort into building relationships won't always pay off overnight but in the long run, it's usually about who you know rather than what you know.

The brilliant thing about being a young minority *female founder in tech* in 2021 is that there's such a wealth of communities and organisations out there to support you, whether it's mentorship or simply swapping ideas and spending some time outside of your industry bubble. Take advantage of this and be visible as much as possible.

What challenges have you faced as a female founder of a cybersecurity business?

I was once told during an interview with a high end law firm that the interviewer initially didn't want to invite me in, based on my surname. Essentially, I was there to tick a box for this company. Affronted by this, but also finding my feet in the very early stages of my career, they actually offered me the role. Needless to say, I didn't stick around long.

As a woman in tech, it can be hard to be taken seriously by peers.

They tend to put more trust in their fellow males, expecting women to know less about technical topics. That can be immensely frustrating but as a rule, whatever challenges I face, I refuse to let these moments hold me back. Instead, I do my best to find a way to make it work.

What are your aspirations for Naq Cyber in 2021?

We are building our Virtual Information Security Officer platform as we speak. We will finish it in the coming months, after which we will start fundraising. We feel confident that our platform will make a massive impact on SMEs, not only protecting them, but giving them space to breathe knowing that their cybersecurity and legal compliance is taken care of.

We're excited to take our Virtual Information Security Officer to the next level, helping thousands of SMEs in the UK, the Netherlands, and then all of Europe.

Nadia Kadhim is CEO at [Naq Cyber](#).

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