Case Study

Ahead Partnership

Addressing the digital skills gap with Ahead Partnership

Customer profile

Industry:
Social Enterprise

Location:
Leeds,UK

Web:
aheadpartnership.org.uk

Solutions provided

- Volunteering as an industry leading guest speaker

- Creation of an educational cyber security resource suite in schools

- Execution of personal teacher development workshops to upskill cyber security knowledge

Business results

- Worked with over 4000 students nationwide

- Delivered guest assemblies in 8 schools

- 78% of students more aware of cyber security and more engaged with digital skills

Customer background

Ahead Partnership is a social enterprise, connecting employers with education, public and private sector partners to drive social and economic change nationwide. Its award-winning Make the Grade programme delivers employer-led, face-to-face careers activities to young people to give them the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm required to make informed career choices.

Perfect partner

As a non-profit organisation, Ahead Partnership relies on a team of volunteer guest speakers to visit educational institutions and engage students from year five to undergraduate level with the world of work.

Ahead Partnership was already working with several successful speakers from the tech sector. However, it desired a volunteer with deep cyber security expertise to support its mission to tackle the digital skills gap.

When Gary Hibberd, managing director of international cyber security consultancy, Agenci, part of the Cyberfort Group, got in touch to find out how he could make a difference, Ahead Partnership quickly realised that it had found the perfect partner.

Gary's passion for encouraging young people into cyber security careers was immediately apparent. Following a successful pilot workshop, where he taught IT students about subjects including the deep web and how to be an ethical operator, Gary was quickly signed up as a Make the Grade guest speaker.

A cyber security hero

Today, Gary is one of Ahead Partnership's most in-demand speakers, and a genuine role model for students nationwide. He has fostered enthusiasm for cyber security in schools across the country by making a career in the industry a reality for the thousands of young people that he has worked with thus far.

In 30 minute guest assemblies, Gary emphasises that students don't necessarily need to go through university and build up debt to achieve a successful career in cyber security.

Gary also contextualises cyber security for a young audience by positioning himself as a 'superhero' battling against malicious individuals. In inimitable style, he stresses the importance of both his and the next generation of cyber professionals' roles in protecting data to make the online world a safer place.

Nowhere has the effectiveness of Gary's relatable approach been more evident than at Bradford Academy. Based in an area of low social mobility, its pupils are sometimes disengaged with their future prospects.

As a self-taught industry expert, Gary gave the Academy's students a window into his own background, and the challenges he overcame at school and beyond to carve out a career in cyber security. Since working with Gary, the attitude of Bradford Academy's pupils towards work has been completely transformed, leading the institution to hail him as the best speaker that they have ever worked with.

Of more than 4000 Make the Grade students that Gary has worked with to date, 78% have reported that they are now more aware of what cyber security means, and feel more engaged with digital skills. This provides clear testimony to the success of the partnership between Agenci, part of the Cyberfort Group and Ahead Partnership, and to the positive impact that Gary continues to have on young peoples' attitudes to work across the UK.

Their verdict

"Gary is more than just a volunteer for Ahead Partnership. He is an ambassador for the cyber security industry and a genuine role model for the children in our partner schools. He's opened the doors to a career that many of our students maynever have previously considered, and boosted their enthusiasm towards the world of work.

But Gary's commitment means that his contribution to Make the Grade goes beyond one-off speaking engagements. In the last academic year, Gary has helped teachers in our schools to create a suite of practical resources to use in computer science classes.

One of these resources simulates a real-life local cybersecurity incident for students to respond to, giving them an early opportunity to develop their digital skills required for a career in the industry. Going the extra mile like this is typical of Gary's approach, and we are delighted to have him as an Ahead Partnership volunteer."

- Megan Lipp, Head of business development at Ahead Partnership

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