

PUBLICATION

The Scarlet Shield Against Cyber Threats: Women Pioneering a Better Digital Future

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Imagine a world reminiscent of Barbie Land, where women are empowered as leaders in the fight against cyber threats. The International Women's Cyber Alliance (IWCA) is making this a reality, providing women and allies with the knowledge, tools, skills, and support they need to excel in the cyber industry. By fostering an inclusive environment, the IWCA ensures that women's voices are heard and valued, paving the way for a safer and secure digital future for everyone.

Why Was the IWCA created?

The IWCA had its origins in casual gatherings of women who met through industry conferences, LinkedIn, and collaborative work on cybersecurity issues over the years. These women included cybersecurity vendors, insurance carriers and brokers, and privacy and technology law attorneys. They quickly recognized a significant lack of representation and resources for women in the cyber industry. Many social events and thought leadership discussions were predominantly male-dominated, often sidelining women's perspectives. The IWCA was established to address and change this imbalance.

What began as casual monthly meetups to discuss industry updates and share knowledge has blossomed into the dynamic IWCA. In just the past year, the organization has grown from its original ten members to more than 400 passionate individuals worldwide.

What is the IWCA's Mission?

The IWCA's mission is to educate women and allies in the cyber industry through mentorship, sharing industry experience, driving equal opportunities, and providing a global support network. Imagine having a community that not only equips you with the skills needed to thrive but also stands by you every step of the way. That's exactly what IWCA hopes to achieve.

The IWCA hosts online and offline seminars, workshops, a book club, and fundraising events – all aimed at making learning accessible and diverse to women and allies in the cyber field. Currently, there are no membership fees because they want to ensure that cost is not a barrier to accessing quality education for women professionals combating cyber threats. Plus, they're gearing up to launch scholarship programs specifically for young women entering the cyber and tech field, helping to offset education expenses.

However, the IWCA's mission goes beyond just professional development. They're committed to supporting women at all stages of their personal and professional lives, fostering a sense of fellowship. Whether it's discussing that elusive "work-life balance" or providing professional education, the IWCA is dedicated to advocating for gender diversity in the cyber industry.

How Did You Get Involved and Why?

Hannah Ji-Otto: I began my legal career in 2013 as a general corporate attorney at a Fortune 500 manufacturing company and later transitioned to private practice, focusing on privacy and technology law. Before the EU GDPR era, privacy and cybersecurity weren't the hot topics they are today. During that time, I connected with several cyber attorneys through LinkedIn and industry conferences. It was amazing to have a

network of friends in privacy law to share ideas with and support each other. Those very connections turned into a team of passionate individuals who started the IWCA as an informal group. They saw a need for gender equality in the cyber realm and took it upon themselves to create and lead this transformative movement.

Fast forward to the pandemic, and the demand for privacy and security incident response work skyrocketed globally. I started attending more webinars hosted by these incredible women leaders. In 2022, I joined Baker's Privacy and Technology Center of Excellence. When the IWCA decided to formally incorporate as a non-profit in 2024, I knew Baker attorneys could provide valuable guidance and expertise. Thanks to the support of Baker Donelson's pro-bono committee, the IWCA officially became a Delaware non-profit organization in July 2024 and applied for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with the IRS in November 2024.

Naomi Migoya: I got involved with the IWCA through Baker Donelson's pro-bono initiative. My mentor, Lucas Lopez, knew that I wanted to help people through pro-bono work and extended the opportunity to help the IWCA form its non-profit organization.

Through various calls and meetings, I got to know the leadership at IWCA and Hannah Ji-Otto. They are such a passionate group, and the sense of community they have already created is tangible, even as someone outside of the cyber industry. Mentorship and support from other women leaders have been key for me as a young lawyer, and I couldn't think of a better way to employ my legal skills than to help the IWCA continue making the cyber industry a more inclusive space.

What Kind of Legacy Does the IWCA Hope to Leave?

The IWCA was created out of a need for change. They hope to create a legacy of inclusion and diversity of thought in the cyber industry. It cannot be overstated how important community is, especially with remote work becoming more prevalent. Through the IWCA, women have a network of other professionals they can reach out to for guidance, mentorship, or, in the words of an IWCA member, a "friendly face" at cyber industry conferences.

While the cyber industry has taken large steps toward diversifying in the United States, the international scene still has a long way to go. Women worldwide are now tuning in to IWCA events because there's often a lack of similar groups and representation in their own countries. When the IWCA started, it was hard to imagine their wide-reaching impact, but the need for community generated a global response.

Along with the inauguration of its home base in the United States, the IWCA also launched a chapter in the United Kingdom in the hopes of making a change that extends beyond borders. In the coming years, the IWCA is set to expand further, with plans to launch chapters in France, Canada, and Bermuda, ultimately aiming to have a presence on all five continents. This initiative is set to leave a lasting impact on the cyber industry, fostering a legacy of inclusion, diversity, and global collaboration.