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Australia's large-scale missing persons hackathon returns in October 2020

For a second year running, AustCyber has partnered with the Australian Federal Police's (AFP) National Missing Persons Coordination Centre, and Canadian-based not-for-profit Trace Labs, to convene a missing persons capture the flag event during Australian Cyber Week.

Through its podcast series 'OzCyber Unlocked', AustCyber announced the **National Missing Persons Hackathon 2020 will be held as an online event on Thursday, 29 October 2020.**

In what was a world first in October 2019, the first Hackathon saw 354 ethical hackers and investigators gather across Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Darwin, Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne to generate 3,912 leads on long-term missing persons selected from existing State and Territory police cases.

Hackathon participants, in teams of four, set about to discover information publicly available on the internet (also known as open source intelligence or OSINT), with the goal of aiding relevant Australian policing jurisdictions in their investigations for the missing persons cases provided for the event.

"The issue of missing persons in Australia is complex and multifaceted. Over 38,000 missing persons reports are submitted to police every year in Australia," said Trish Halligan, Team Leader at the AFP's National Missing Persons Coordination Centre.

"This is a huge number which impacts not only the police who are responsible for finding them, but also the many people who are affected and devastated by the uncertainty and helplessness of having loved ones missing."

Following the successes of last year's event, the 2020 Hackathon is being scaled to maximise the chances of finding crucial pieces of data:

- each registered participant will be provided with free self-paced foundational training modules for OSINT, specifically developed for the Australian OSINT environment. This has been generously donated by an Australian specialist company, OSINT Combine.

- during the month of October, a webinar series will be delivered by AustCyber featuring OSINT and cyber security experts from Australia and the USA.
- the livestream on 29 October will provide enhanced user experience for the day, including presentations, mentoring sessions and a live leader board.
- a new website will be deployed to provide up-to-date information to participants and be used as an ongoing resource for the broader community.

Telstra, [Vault Cloud](#), [Cybermerc](#), Commonwealth Bank of Australia and [Fifth Domain](#) have returned as sponsors for 2020. [OSINT Combine](#) joins as a new sponsor, providing the OSINT foundational training modules for all participants.

“OSINT is derived from publicly available information or open source information,” said Chris Poulter, Founder and CEO of OSINT Combine. “In the context of crowdsourcing, OSINT is a force multiplier. Using public resources and people in a group setting for a ‘collection activity’ allows the analysts and investigators to spend more time on the critical part of connecting the dots and understanding the picture.”

Linda Cavanagh, National Network Lead at AustCyber and Founder of the Hackathon series said, “The scaling of the National Missing Persons Hackathon 2020 could not have been achieved without the generosity of our sponsors. Through their support, we can provide 500+ participants with the opportunity to upskill or gain new skills in cyber and OSINT.

“This is a win-win situation. Not only are we providing every possible chance to find that one piece of crucial information that could assist police with a missing person, but we’re also creating interest for a new cohort to enter the cyber security industry.”

The concept of this crowdsourced platform originates from not-for-profit organisation Trace Labs. They have delivered their CTF model throughout Canada and the United States, and more recently with monthly virtual events known as ‘Global OSINT Search Party CTFs’ that allow participation from around the world.

“Seeing a whole country embrace our crowdsourced OSINT missing persons model was truly amazing last year”, said Adrian Korn, Director of OSINT Operations at Trace Labs. “We operate in many locations around the globe, working with multiple law enforcement agencies. We can confidently say that Australia and its law enforcement agencies are at the forefront of innovation when it comes to progressive solutions to enhance public safety.”

Tickets to participate in the event go on sale on 1 September 2020 via the newly created www.missingpersonshackathon.com.au.

You can listen to Ep2 of Ozcyber Unlocked to learn more about last year’s Hackathon and this year’s exciting event:

- Apple Podcasts – <https://apple.co/2QcTaaV>
- Spotify – <https://spoti.fi/32760gu>
- You can also search for OzCyber Unlocked on [Buzzsprout](#)

The partnership between AustCyber, AFP's National Missing Persons Coordination Centre and Trace Labs demonstrates the value they bring together, including:

- harnessing the Australian community to generate leads and assist police in their investigations on missing person cases.
- showcasing the different elements to cyber security such as ethical hackers.
- highlighting the diversity of cyber security careers, skills and the people who hold them.
- demonstrating cyber security crowdsourcing as a technical value add element to law enforcement as well as a social value add element to the community.

Further information

About AustCyber

AustCyber is a publicly funded, private entity which commenced on 1 January 2017. Our mission is to grow Australia's cyber security sector, to support the development of a vibrant and globally competitive Australian cyber security sector. In doing so, our activities enhance Australia's future economic growth in a digitally enabled global economy and improve the sovereign cyber capabilities available to protect our nation's economy and community.

Our funding comes from majority Federal Government grants – funding for operations and programs, and for the AU\$15 million AustCyber Projects Fund which provides grants to projects that deliver national benefit. We also receive funding under contracts with the governments of the ACT, NSW, QLD, SA, TAS, WA and the Sunshine Coast Regional Council and Townsville City Council, which we match, to deliver AustCyber's national network of Cyber Security Innovation Nodes – with the NT and VIC soon to join.

We work to align and scale Australian cyber security research and innovation related activities across the private sector, research communities, academia and within Australian governments. We are responsible for maintaining a strong supply of innovative Australian cyber security solutions and capability and have established ourselves as an independent advocate for the competitive and comparative advantages of Australian technical and non-technical cyber security capabilities.

Beyond our shores, we work with partners across many countries to develop export pathways for Australian solutions and capability. This helps the rapidly growing Australian cyber security sector tap into market 'hot spots' around the world.

Website: www.austcyber.com

Australian Federal Police's National Missing Persons Coordination Centre

The National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC) is a non-operational arm of the Australian Federal Police (AFP). The NMPCC was established in 2006 to drive national coordination in response to missing persons in Australia, and to complement the investigative role of State and Territory police. Its

mandate is to reduce the incidence and impact of missing persons in Australia and as a function of the AFP, the NMPCC is funded by the Federal Government.

Website: www.missingpersons.gov.au

Trace Labs

Trace Labs is a Not-For-Profit organisation with the mission of crowdsourcing the collection of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) to generate new leads on missing persons cases to assist law enforcement.

The missing persons issue is worsening, requiring modern and scalable solutions at various levels to help mitigate risk to society. To solve this problem, Trace Labs built their "Search Party" platform to enable the collection and processing of OSINT at scalable levels through virtual operations and events known as OSINT Search Parties. This has evolved the concept of a typical search party where community volunteers are on the ground helping law enforcement look for missing people and have taken it online so that anyone around the world can help using their cyber skills.

Website: www.tracelabs.org

Media enquiries

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