INFORMATION SECURITY EXPERT JATIN SEHGAL:

‘At VU, I have learned to see the big picture’

August 2015 – Information security expert Jatin Sehgal’s schedule is ‘loaded’, but he was happy to free up an hour for VU. Jatin talked passionately about ISO27001, cyber and software security as an opportunity for growth, and that one word around which everything else revolves: trust.

By René Rector
Illustration: Roel Koning

92 people on LinkedIn say that you are an expert in the area of ISO27001. What does that mean exactly? Today, in this complex, sophisticated and connected world we use the internet for everything. We place a great deal of privacy-sensitive information on the internet. We perform financial transactions, buy things and open up about our social life. And we do all that with the fullest confidence that our information will not end up on the street or that our bank account will not suddenly be empty. In order to make all that work securely, organizations and banks have to put in a great deal of effort. ISO270001 is a norm that requires it. If asked what I would have done differently, I’d say if I had the chance to do it all again, I would have come to the Netherlands sooner.

Do you now feel like a Dutch person? ‘I feel more like a global citizen. As a child, I lived in a small town in India and I had small dreams. But even at that time I wanted a job where I would meet many people and encounter many different perspectives. Now I live in the Netherlands and travel all over the world, but I am always with my family on weekends. A big plus to living in such a centrally located country with internationally minded people. I am living my dream.’

Is that what you learned in the post-graduate IT Audit programme? ‘I did indeed learn to see the bigger picture. I sat in the lecture halls with fellow students from large companies like ING and Philips. I especially learned what information security means from their perspective. I then understood how important the information security element is in the whole chain. Imagine you have a webshop and you do a great deal of marketing. But when customers get close to check-out, they start having doubts about your reliability. That is penny wise, pound foolish. I also learned that people are always the weakest link. A computer system does what you tell it to do. With people, you have to wait and see.’

My work, however, is sexy... and exciting! IT-security is primarily an opportunity

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How did you end up at VU? ‘It was practical. And the programme is good. And most of all, who in IT would not want to study at the university where Andrew Tanenbaum taught? When I started doing information security audits, I knew that I had to do IT Audit studies. Norea (the professional organisation of IT auditors, ed.) requires it.

What do you look back on with pleasure? ‘The programme was in Dutch, but everyone was very helpful. And the Friday evening receptions were a good way to socialise. I had not been in the Netherlands long and I needed to mingle. Instructors Ronald Paans and Abbas Shahim also did a great job getting me involved during lectures. I spoke English myself during my stay at VU, and I tried to pick up as much Dutch as possible. Ronald and Abbas made sure that I stayed involved, even though the language was difficult. If asked what I would have done differently, I’d say if I had the chance to do it all again, I would have come to the Netherlands sooner.

And what does your department do if the information security is not what it should be? ‘Then we help them improve things. Today, in this complex, sophisticated and connected world we use the internet for everything. We place a great deal of privacy-sensitive information on the internet. We perform financial transactions, buy things and open up about our social life. And we do all that with the fullest confidence that our information will not end up on the street or that our bank account will not suddenly be empty. By René Rector
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