

An evaluation of the “Ethical Hacker”

Introduction

Joe exhibited great initiative and perseverance in teaching himself penetration testing. While he did many things right, he did make a few mistakes along the way. We'll use the ACM “Code of Ethics” to cross-reference his actions and their ethical implications.

Regarding the use of public sites for pen testing practice

The ACM “Code of Ethics” section 2.8 specifically states that “A system being publicly accessible is not sufficient grounds on its own to imply authorization.” If Joe wanted to test his skills on these sites specifically, he should have reached out to the administrators of said sites for permission; most sites appreciate this sort of thing and will work with you. Also, if Joe had done an ounce of research, he would've found that there are countless “Honey Pot” sites that exist for the sole purpose of testing the skills of people and already have given permission to those such people to do so. Furthermore, the text specifically states that Joe is using the aforementioned public sites to increase his skills which he will directly use for monetary gain. This can be viewed as a minor form of exploitation or stealing. He's using their sites for monetary gain and has no permission or agreement with them.

Regarding the self-taught nature of Joe's Qualifications

As for Joe's self-taught nature, there's no inherent problem in being self-taught. Especially in a field where techniques advance faster than traditional education can keep up. Any issue incurred in this area would be purely if Joe markets himself as being better or more experienced as he really is. ACM “Code of Ethics” Section 2.6 mentions “A computing professional is responsible for evaluating potential work assignments ... And making a judgment about whether the work assignment is within the professional's areas of competence.” The document does not state whether Joe gained the skills he needed or not, just that he believes he did. As long as he enters the market with small bounties and works his way up. I see no issue.

Conclusion

It is quite admirable for Joe to see through the prospect of self-teaching himself penetration testing. This particular field is one of the better for this approach. If Joe had done a little more research before beginning, he would've avoided his pitfalls. His use of professional, public sites as guinea pigs without their knowledge or consent was wrong, violates the ACM Code of Ethics, as well as can be seen as being exploitative. On the other hand, while the nature of being self-taught isn't inherently wrong, Joe needs to be careful with how he markets himself. All in all, Joe's actions vary from being undoubtedly wrong to being in a grey area.