Be Cyber Smart:
How TikTok uses Cyberstrength to stay a step ahead with HackerOne

TikTok has rapidly become one of the fastest-growing entertainment platforms, with over one billion users worldwide, including over 170 million users and 7.5 million businesses in the United States alone. TikTok isn't just a platform for entertainment; it's a hub for creativity, learning, connection, and joy. However, this explosive growth requires innovative solutions to keep such a large, global community secure.

We have a strong partnership with HackerOne. Since launching the program in 2020, we've deeply valued their support, which has allowed us to greatly expand our program's scope and impact.

Ethan
Product Vulnerability Management Lead, TikTok

Challenge

Before partnering with HackerOne, TikTok relied primarily on its security teams and an internal bug bounty program to identify and address vulnerabilities. While its internal security infrastructure is robust, TikTok recognized that keeping pace with its exponential user growth and the ever-evolving threat landscape required an engaged community of researchers to provide fresh perspectives. TikTok faced scaling its security efforts, protecting a vast and complex ecosystem of interconnected systems, and securing over one billion users worldwide.

Solution

In response to these challenges, TikTok strategically partnered with HackerOne in 2020, implementing a comprehensive bug bounty program. This partnership began with a public bug bounty program, starting with a limited scope and gradually expanding to include numerous domains and participating in Live Hacking Events. The program was designed for continuous engagement, allowing security researchers to report vulnerabilities year-round, and it was supplemented by focused live hacking events like the HackerOne World Cup and TikTok's live hacking event in Las Vegas.

A key aspect of TikTok's approach has been transparency and clear communication. Using the HackerOne platform for interactions with security researchers, TikTok establishes clear records and explanations for all decisions. They've also implemented a competitive bounty structure to attract and retain the world's top security researchers. Since 2020, TikTok expanded the scope of what security researchers can test, including new assets from acquisitions. Its guidelines page has continuously been refined to communicate expectations and focus areas to the security researcher community.

> *At TikTok, we always want to be proactive rather than reactive. We aim to shift left, finding bugs at an early stage to ensure the safety of our environment before it goes live.*
>
> **Suhana Hyder**
> Global Head of Vulnerability Management, TikTok

Results

With the help of security researchers, TikTok has resolved thousands of vulnerabilities before malicious actors could exploit them. The financial investment in this program is substantial, with TikTok paying out over $400,000 in bounties in just one afternoon of a live hacking event and nearly $3M in program history. Beyond immediate vulnerability discovery, the insights from security researchers have helped TikTok enhance its internal security testing skills and strengthen its Software Development Lifecycle by shifting

security practices left to address issues earlier in the development process.

This proactive approach to security has improved TikTok's defenses and proven cost-effective. By identifying and fixing issues before they reach production, TikTok has significantly reduced the cost and effort associated with remediation. Moreover, the program has played a crucial role in building trust with the hacker community and TikTok's vast user base by demonstrating a strong and visible commitment to security.

Looking Ahead With TikTok and HackerOne

TikTok is focused on deepening relationships with skilled security researchers to continue producing high-quality vulnerability reports. They plan to expand the scope of their program further, ensuring comprehensive coverage of their evolving platform. TikTok aims to leverage insights from security researchers to stay ahead of emerging threats and security challenges, maintaining a proactive security stance that identifies and addresses potential issues as early as possible.

By maintaining this forward-thinking approach to security and leveraging the global ethical hacking community through HackerOne, TikTok stays at the forefront of platform security in the rapidly evolving social media landscape. This commitment to security is not just about protecting data – it's about providing a safe and secure environment where over one billion users and businesses worldwide can create, learn, and continue to find joy and creativity.

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HackerOne is a global leader in offensive security solutions. Our HackerOne Platform combines AI with the ingenuity of the largest community of security researchers to find and fix security, privacy, and AI vulnerabilities across the software development lifecycle. The platform offers bug bounty, vulnerability disclosure, pentesting, AI red teaming, and code security. We are trusted by industry leaders like Amazon, Anthropic, Crypto.com, General Motors, GitHub, Goldman Sachs, Uber, and the U.S. Department of Defense. HackerOne was named a Best Workplace for Innovators by Fast Company in 2023 and a Most Loved Workplace for Young Professionals in 2024.

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