Is Cyber Essentials right for my business?

Introduction

69% of Cyber Essentials graduates believe that the Cyber Essentials scheme has increased their market competitiveness. The Scheme has become increasingly popular; over the 12-month period, from June 2024 to June 2025, 51,068 certificates were awarded.

The certificate shows your business takes cybersecurity seriously and has the basic protections in place to defend against common online threats. It's designed especially for small and medium-sized businesses, giving you a solid foundation of security without huge cost or complexity.

We are currently seeing the evolution of Cyber Essentials from being a competitive advantage to prerequisite and a requirement to tender in certain industries. The following article discusses whether Cyber Essentials may be right for your business.

5 Reasons It's Time To Consider Cyber Essentials

1. To Protect the Business from Common Attacks

Cyber criminals don't discriminate based on the size or sector of your business. It's important your business is using best practices to ensure you remain secure. Cyber Essentials helps you and your business implement these practices to protect against common threats such as phishing, malware and unauthorised access.

Cyber Essentials focuses on five key controls that block the vast majority of routine cyber threats:

Firewalls
Securing your internet connection
Ensuring that a security filter between the internet and your organisations network in place will help you stay safe. A firewall will act as an important barrier to block any harmful traffic or threats from entering your network.

Secure Configuration
Setting up systems & devices correctly
Cyber criminals will do anything they can to find a way into your network. Setting up your devices & systems securely will minimise these risks and ensure you remain protected.

Access Control
Ensuring only authorised users can access data
Implement access control so that only authorised users can access your data and services. This allows organisations to control what level of access a user has which ensures accurate authentication and accountability.

Malware Protection
Preventing viruses and ransomware
There are many ways in which malware can find its way onto your device. Something as simple as opening a compromised website can infect a system.

Patch Management
Keeping software up to date
Out of date software and systems can be an easy way in for a cybercriminal to gain access into your enviroment. Keeping everything up to date will prevent unwanted access to vulnerabilities that may leave a device comprimised if not fully patched and updated.

By meeting these standards known vulnerabilities can be patched before being exploited.

80%
believe being certified can reduce the financial cost to their org of an unsophisticated cyber attack

2. To Win Trust and New Business

Understanding risk management in the face of cyber threats is an essential step in building resilience, and with trust and reputation being the foundation for both new and old business relationships, it's vital to maintain this.

A cyber attack can singlehandedly take down a business and cause immense reputational damage. Obtaining a Cyber Essentials certification will help your business keep in control of any cyber risks and maintain a high level of responsibility towards customers and your supply chain.

Many government contracts and large-company supply chains now require Cyber Essentials certification before doing business. This is an important step towards reducing the risk of any attack by ensuring the correct measure are already in place.

It can also help differentiate your company from competitors by providing proof that your business has a commitment to cybersecurity. With a Cyber Essentials certification, you are protecting your business, customers and suppliers and providing them with the reassurance that you care about data.

3. To Demonstrate Compliance and Good Governance

Cyber Essentials supports compliance with data-protection laws like the UK GDPR and NIS2, showing you've taken reasonable steps to protect personal and business data.

Whilst Cyber Essentials is not a GDPR certification, it can be valuable if you ever face a regulatory inquiry or customer question about your security practices.

4. To Lower Costs and Insurance Premiums

Some cyber-insurance providers offer lower premiums or easier acceptance if you have Cyber Essentials certification, as it proves you're managing risk effectively. Insurers such as Aviva, Hiscox, and AXA have confirmed that Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus certifications can make you eligible for lower premiums or more favourable terms.

79%

of users believe the scheme has a positive impact on the confidence of their own clients and customers.

5. To Build Confidence Internally

It's not just about technology - Cyber Essentials helps you:

- Train staff on good security habits.
- Establish clear security policies.
- Understand your own IT risks.

The points above helps build a stronger security culture across your organisation.

Cyber Essentials equals an affordable, recognised proof that your business is secure and trustworthy.

It reduces risk, builds customer confidence, and can open doors to new opportunities.

What Cyber Essentials Plus adds that Cyber Essentials does not

- Independent technical audit, not just self-assessment.
- With Cyber Essentials you usually submit a self-assessment questionnaire and declare you've implemented the required controls.
- With Cyber Essentials Plus you must undergo hands-on testing and verification by an accredited body - e.g., external vulnerability scans, internal device checks, and in-some-cases on-site auditor checks.
- This gives you a stronger "proof" that your security controls are not just planned or documented, but actually in place and working.
- Greater assurance (credibility) with stakeholders.
- Because of the audit, Cyber Essentials Plus tends to carry more weight with customers, suppliers, partners and insurers as evidence of solid cyber hygiene.

IT Governance

If your organisation is bidding for contracts (especially in regulated or public sectors) then having Cyber Essentials Plus can strengthen your pitch.

Because of the vulnerability scanning & testing built into CE Plus, you're more likely to uncover real-world weak spots and fix them, rather than just having a "paper" compliance.

That helps reduce your risk of a breach, downtime or customer-impact.

But there are some things to be aware of:

"Higher assurance" = more effort and cost:
Because of the extra audit and technical checks, Cyber Essentials Plus is more demanding (internally and financially) than the standard Cyber Essentials.

It doesn't mean everything is perfect:
Cyber Essentials Plus still focuses on the same five controls - firewalls, secure configuration, access control, malware protection, patch management, but with stronger verification. It's not the same as full ISO 27001 or other certifications.

Certification is only one part of ongoing security:
Having the certificate doesn't mean you're "done". Your business still needs to keep systems patched, staff trained, and controls enforced.
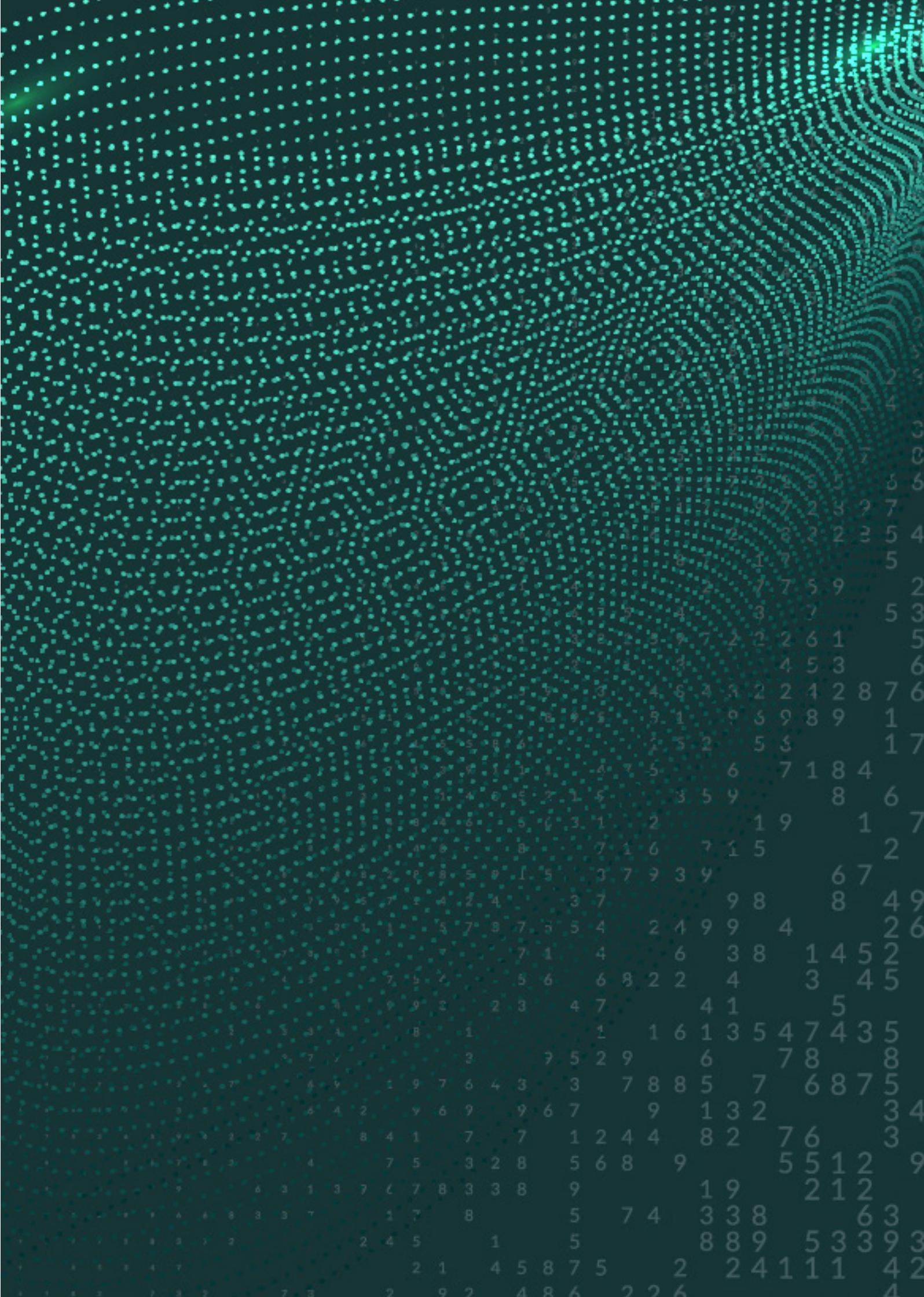
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