

VCISO BLUEPRINT

**Strategic Security without
Full-Time overhead**



threatproof

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INTRODUCTION

You're not alone.

More and more growing businesses face the same challenge:
You need cybersecurity leadership but not a full-time hire.

CISOs are expensive (often £120K+ per year), cyber risks are rising, and your internal teams are already doing more with less. That's where the Virtual CISO (vCISO) model comes in: a flexible, expert-led way to gain strategic guidance without the overhead.

This guide is your **roadmap to agile, high-impact cybersecurity leadership for growing businesses** tailored to help you make confident, informed decisions about your security strategy.

Why this guide is essential?

This guide was created for **IT leaders, CISOs, CIOs, and risk managers** in growing UK organisations who need strategic cybersecurity leadership without the budget, complexity, or delay of a full-time hire.



Inside, you will find:

- A clear breakdown of the vCISO model
- How it compares to traditional CISO roles
- Strategic benefits for your business
- Pricing benchmarks and cost analysis
- Practical steps for integrating a vCISO into your existing team
- A checklist to help you assess whether the model is right for you

It's not just an introduction, it's a decision-making tool to help you assess, plan, and act.



WHAT IS A VIRTUAL CISO?

A Virtual Chief Information Security Officer (vCISO) is a senior cybersecurity expert who provides strategic security leadership on a part-time, remote or project basis.

It's a flexible alternative to hiring a full-time CISO, ideal for SMEs and growing businesses.

Unlike short-term consultants, a vCISO works long-term, helping organisations build, steer, and improve their security strategy, often acting as a trusted advisor to senior leadership on compliance, risk, and incident response.

Core Responsibilities



"vCISOs offer enterprise-level security leadership without the cost of a full-time hire."
— Threatproof, 2024



vCISO vs Traditional CISO

Choosing between a vCISO and a full-time CISO depends on your business size, resources, and security maturity. Both provide leadership, but the model, cost, and flexibility differ significantly.

COMPARISON TABLE

Criteria	vCISO	Traditional CISO
 Cost	£3,000–£10,000/month (flexible)	£120,000–£200,000/year + benefits
 Commitment	Part-time or project-based	Full-time
 Expertise	Access to multi-sector specialists	Single individual's experience
 Speed	Immediate onboarding	6–12 month
 Best for	SMEs, startups, temporary needs	Large, complex organisations

When a vCISO makes more sense

- Limited budget, but need senior security leadership
- Urgent compliance or audit deadlines (e.g. NIS2)
- Interim coverage (e.g. maternity leave or transition)
- Specific projects (e.g. cloud migration, due diligence)

When a traditional CISO is better

- High-risk or regulated sectors (finance, healthcare)
- Need 24/7 presence and internal team management
- Long-term transformation programmes



Strategic benefits of hiring a virtual CISO

A virtual Chief Information Security Officer (vCISO) is more than a technical role. It's a strategic decision that drives compliance, security, and business performance.



Cost Efficiency

Enjoy up to 60% cost savings compared to hiring a permanent CISO, without sacrificing leadership quality.



Access to Elite Expertise

Most SMEs can't compete for top-tier cybersecurity talent. A vCISO often brings decades of experience, including regulatory mastery and ecross-sector exposure.



Compliance Readiness

From ISO 27001 to GDPR and NIS2, vCISOs accelerate your compliance journey, helping avoid penalties and pass audits.



Faster Security Maturity

vCISOs focus on quick wins and long-term strategy. They help businesses improve their cybersecurity posture within months, not years.



Objective, unbiased perspective

External by nature, a vCISO brings independence, free from internal politics and vendor influence.



The growing vCISO market

Key numbers to know



Market growth

- The vCISO market is projected to reach \$1.58 to \$7.5B by 2032, depending on the region and study.
- Annual growth estimates range from **6.3% to 21.5%**.



Cost impact at scale

As adoption increases, companies of all sizes are replacing fixed cybersecurity overhead with flexible models.

60% savings are possible, especially for SMEs and fast growing organisations when shifting to a vCISO approach.

The market continues to grow because the model is both cost-efficient and outcome-driven.



Why it matters

vCISO offer enterprise-grade leadership with startup agility.

They accelerate compliance, reduce risk, and offer flexibility without long-term hiring commitments.



vCISO Extended Domains

A vCISO's role goes beyond strategic leadership. In addition to core responsibilities like security planning and compliance oversight, they can take on extended domains that support the day-to-day resilience of your organisation.

From documentation and training to board reporting and audit readiness, a vCISO brings hands-on expertise across all layers of your cybersecurity ecosystem, always aligned with your operational needs and business priorities.

Where else can a vCISO help?



"A vCISO bridges the gap between business strategy and cyber risk translating complex challenges into clear, actionable steps."

— Threatproof, 2024



How much does a vCISO cost?

Hiring a vCISO gives you access to expert leadership without the overhead of a full-time hire. Costs vary depending on your needs, but the model is always more flexible and cost-effective than a permanent CISO.

Model	Monthly Cost Range (UK)	Use case
Fractional	£3,000 – £8,000	Ongoing strategic guidance (e.g. 1-3 days/month)
Project-based	£5,000 – £20,000+ (one-off)	Compliance, audits, due diligence
Interim	£10,000 – £18,000/month	Full coverage during transition or crisis

Full-time CISO salaries range from £120K to £200K/year, not including bonuses, stock or benefits.

COSTS DRIVERS:

- Complexity of systems
- Regulatory pressure
- Scope of engagement

“The true value of a vCISO lies not just in the lower cost, but in the flexibility to scale security leadership up or down, as your business evolves.”



Services you can expect

A vCISO brings more than strategic advice, they deliver actionable services tailored to your business context. Whether you're facing compliance deadlines, expanding into new markets, or recovering from an incident, the vCISO adapts to your needs.

Service	What It Includes
Strategy	Define roadmap, align with business goals, prioritise key initiatives
Compliance	Prepare for ISO 27001, NIS2, GDPR, or customer-specific requirements
Risk Management	Identify, assess, and mitigate cyber risks
Incident Readiness	Develop and test response plans, conduct tabletop exercises
Documentation	Draft security policies, procedures, internal playbooks, staff & exec training
Board Reporting	Translate technical risks into business impact, deliver executive dashboards

CUSTOM ENGAGEMENTS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Conducting security due diligence for M&A
- Supporting RFP responses and client audits
- Building a security programme from scratch
- Acting as DPO or compliance lead in interim

"The strength of the vCISO model is, its ability to blend advisory, operational execution, and strategic leadership, all within a flexible engagement."



How the vCISO works in practice

Once the decision is made to engage a Virtual CISO, what happens next?

Unlike a one-off consultant or an external auditor, a vCISO works as an embedded security leader, aligning closely with your internal teams, business strategy, and regulatory needs.

From the first onboarding call to strategic reporting, the process is structured yet flexible to your organisation's pace.

Here's how a typical vCISO engagement unfolds in practice:



Unlike project-based consultants, a vCISO acts as a long-term strategic partner, bringing clarity, coordination, and continuity to your security programme.



vCISO Tools & Platforms

A vCISO doesn't operate in a vacuum they rely on proven frameworks, tools, and platforms to deliver structured, measurable results. These solutions ensure consistency, visibility, and traceability across your security programme.



Frameworks

ISO 27001, NIST , CIS Controls



Compliance Tools

ISO 27001, NIST , CIS Controls



Dashboards

Power BI / Excel / Jira, custom KPIs)



Documentation

Confluence /Notion /Google Workspace



Collaboration

Microsoft Teams / Slack / Trello / Asana / Monday

"A good vCISO knows how to embed themselves into your existing environment, not replace it, using familiar tools to drive security forward."



Choosing the right provider

Choosing a vCISO isn't just about finding a cybersecurity expert, it's about finding the right strategic partner who understands your business context, industry constraints, and growth ambitions.

What to look for:

- Experience in your sector
- Proven frameworks
- Clear reporting
- Cultural & operational fit



Questions to ask:

- What similar clients have you helped?
- How do you track impact?
- Are you available in a crisis?



Red flags:

- Overly technical answers
- No compliance experience
- One-size-fits-all approach



How to integrate a vCISO

Bringing in a vCISO is straightforward, but it requires alignment with internal teams and priorities. Here's how to make the most of this engagement:

1

Define your security priorities

Compliance, risk, maturity

2

Choose the right model

fractional, interim, project

3

Assign an internal liaison

CTO, IT manager)to coordinate

4

Align on KPIs

e.g. risk score, compliance status, audit pass rates

5

Track impact and iterate quarterly



Checklist : Ready to choose a vCISO

Before engaging a vCISO, it's helpful to assess your current context and readiness. Use this quick checklist to determine if the model is a good fit for your organisation.



Checklist

If you checked 3 or more boxes, a vCISO could be the strategic resource you're missing.

Questions	Yes / No
You lack internal security leadership or expertise?	
You face compliance deadlines (GDPR, ISO 27001, NIS2, etc.).	
You're under pressure from clients or partners to prove your security posture?	
You've experienced a breach or feel unprepared to handle one?	
You need to define or update your security roadmap?	
You want executive-level advice without the cost of hiring a full-time CISO.	
You don't have a central security policy or incident response plan.	
Your board or leadership team lacks visibility on cybersecurity risks.	
You're unsure whether your tools (EDR, firewall, backup...) are truly effective.	
You don't have regular security reporting or dashboards to monitor progress.	

A vCISO brings structure, speed, and security maturity without locking you into a full-time hire.

"Cybersecurity isn't just about defense, it's about enabling growth."



Sample vCISO mission template

What does a typical virtual CISO engagement look like ?
Here's an example structure to help you plan ahead and align expectations.

1. KICK-OFF & ASSESSMENT	2. ROADMAP DEFINITION	3. MONTHLY PREPAREDNESS	4. CLOSURE
			
6. MONTH ROADMAP			
WEEK 1-2	MONTH 2-5	MONTH 3-4	MONTH 6
✓ Kick-off call ✓ Risk posture baseline ✓ Asset Inventory ✓ Stakeholder interviews	✓ Monthly health check ✓ Support on vendor selection or SOC:SIEM integration ✓ Coaching internal team (CIO, DPO...)	✓ Dashboard update ✓ Progress vs KPIs ✓ Key risks & recommendations	 Final report
 Pyscading PDY starter kit	 Incident Plan Pack	 Executiv summary Optional	 Frequency
FORMAT	FREQUENCY	FREQUENCY	
Live calls	1-2x./month	Weekly or an-hoc	
Email / Slack sync	Weekly or an-hoc	Weekly or an-hoc	
PDF reports	Dashboards, summaries	Monthly / Quaterly	



Sources

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11. Cybersecurity Challenges for SMEs: Secureframe+1thevcisodirectory.com+1



Ready to explore the vCISO model?

About Threatproof

We help fast-growing organisations build cybersecurity maturity through flexible, high-impact strategies. From compliance to incident response, our vCISOs turn complexity into clarity.

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Let's talk

Interested in strengthening your cybersecurity leadership without the overhead of a full-time hire?

Let's connect.

