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Anthony Levandowski

Anthony Levandowski (born March 15, 1980) is a French-American self-driving car engineer.^[1] He is known for advancing the field of autonomous vehicles and for pleading guilty to trade secret theft.^[2] In 2009, Levandowski co-founded Google's self-driving car program, now known as Waymo, and was a technical lead until 2016.^{[3][4]} In 2016, he co-founded and sold Otto, an autonomous trucking company, to Uber Technologies.^{[5][6]} In 2018, he co-founded the autonomous trucking company Pronto; the first self-driving technology company to complete a cross-country drive in an autonomous vehicle in October 2018.^{[7][8]} At the 2019 AV Summit hosted by The Information, Levandowski remarked that a fundamental breakthrough in artificial intelligence is needed to move autonomous vehicle technology forward.^[9]

In 2019, Levandowski was indicted on 33 federal charges of alleged theft of self-driving car trade secrets.^[10] In August 2020, Levandowski admitted to illegally downloading thousands of files before leaving Waymo, pleaded guilty to one of the 33 charges, and was sentenced to 18 months in prison.^{[11][12][13][14]} He was pardoned less than six months later on January 20, 2021, the last day of Donald Trump's presidency.^[15] In September, 2021 Levandowski rejoined the Pronto leadership team full time as CEO; subsequently announcing the company's new offroad autonomous division.^[16]

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Anthony Levandowski



Levandowski

Born	March 15, 1980 <div>Brussels, Belgium</div>
Alma mater	University of California, Berkeley
Occupation	Co-Founder of Pronto
Known for	Pleading guilty to trade secret theft <p>Co-Founding <u>Waymo</u> (2009–2016)</p> <p>Co-Founding <u>Ottomotto</u> (2016)</p>
Notable work	Ghost Rider: an autonomous motorcycle <p>PriboT: the first autonomous vehicle to drive on public roads</p>
Height	6' 6"
Website	<u>anthonylevandowski.com</u> (<u>https://anthonylevandowski.com</u>)

Early life

Levandowski was born on March 15, 1980, in Brussels, Belgium to a French diplomat mother and an American businessman. He moved to California in the mid-1990s. During his teenage years, he developed websites for local businesses.^[4]

In 1998, Levandowski entered the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in Industrial Engineering and Operations Research.^[17] As a freshman, he founded La Raison, an intranet and IT services company that made fifty thousand dollars in its first year.^{[18][4]} His sophomore year, Levandowski built the BillSortBot, a robot made from 300 Lego pieces that sorted Monopoly money for the Sun Microsoft robotics competition. He won first place.^[18] In 2003, Levandowski launched Construction Control Systems with Randy Miller to build WorkTop, a portable blueprint reader and updater for construction sites.^[18]

In 2003, Levandowski and fellow UC Berkeley engineers, aka the "Blue Team", started building an autonomous motorcycle, nicknamed Ghost Rider, for the 2004 DARPA Grand Challenge.^[19] The Ghost Rider motorcycle was originally a Honda RX. It was built over several years for an estimated \$100,000 and competed in the DARPA Grand Challenge in 2004 and 2005. It was the only autonomous two-wheeled vehicle in the competitions.^[20] The motorcycle was retrofitted with video cameras, computers, a GPS receiver, an IMU, and motors to power the clutch and steering.^[21] As the team lead, participation in the DARPA Grand Challenge paved the way for Levandowski to build PriBot, the first self-driving car to drive on public roads.^[22] In 2007, Levandowski donated the Ghost Rider to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, where it now resides.^{[22][4]}

Career

In 2006, Levandowski began working with Sebastian Thrun, whom he had met at the 2005 DARPA Grand Challenge, on VueTool. Vuetool was a Stanford street mapping project that used cameras mounted on vehicles to create maps.^[23] In early 2007, Google X hired Thrun, Levandowski, and their entire team to help develop the Google Street View system. To meet Larry Page's target of capturing 1,000,000 kilometres (620,000 mi) of roadways before the end of 2007, Levandowski ordered 100 Toyota Priuses from a local dealership.^[23] The Street View team's success was partially due to the "Topcon box" or IP-S2 Mobile Mapping System, a roof mounted box composed of Lidar, cameras, GPS, IMUs, and wheel encoders that enabled a car to drive around and create a 3D map. The Topcon box was designed by 510 Systems, a start-up co-founded by Levandowski in early 2007 alongside Pierre-Yves Droz and Andrew Schultz.^{[24][23][20]} Google employed 510 Systems technology until it quietly acquired the company in 2011.^[20]



Levandowski (right) at MCE 2016

In 2008, Levandowski was approached by the director of Discovery Channel's *Prototype This!* requesting to use the Ghost Rider in an episode to deliver a pizza using an unmanned vehicle. The Ghost Rider was in the Smithsonian at the time, so Levandowski offered to retrofit a Toyota Prius for the show.^[20] Levandowski approached Google and 510 Systems with the venture, but they both

turned him down for liability reasons. Levandowski stated, in an interview with *The Guardian*, "Google was very supportive of the idea, but it absolutely did not want its name associated with it. Google was worried about a Google engineer building a car that crashes and kills someone."^[25] In June 2008, with Google's blessing, Levandowski founded Anthony's Robots in order to build the PriBot.^{[26][19]} The PriBot was "a self-driving Toyota Prius with one of the first spinning Lidar laser ranging units and the first-ever to drive on public roads."^[25] For the show footage, the police cleared the road and escorted the driverless Prius on a pre-determined route from San Francisco across the Bay Bridge. The drive was successful, aside from scraping against a guard rail on a sharp turn. Within the span of weeks, Levandowski had demonstrated that self-driving cars were possible, even on a budget.^[20] By early 2009, Levandowski and Thrun were greenlit by Brin and Page to launch their own driverless car project within Google. Anthony's Robots was acquired by Google in 2011 alongside his company 510 Systems for an estimated \$20 million.^{[20][27]}

In 2009, Levandowski and Thrun co-founded Google's self-driving car project (Chauffeur), now known as Waymo. Over the next two years, Levandowski's 510 Systems built five additional self-driving Priuses for Google.^[23] In 2011, Levandowski lobbied Nevada to allow the testing of autonomous vehicles. In May 2012, the Las Vegas DMV performed the first self-driving car test with Chris Urmson in the driver's seat and Anthony Levandowski in the passenger seat. The car passed the test.^[28] Levandowski continued to work as a technical lead on Google's self-driving car project alongside Chris Urmson, Dmitri Dolgov, and Mike Montemerlo until January 2016, when he left to launch Otto. In addition to Project Chauffeur, Levandowski's contributions to Google include work on Street View, Cardboard, Telepresence, Ground Truth, Oblique Aerial Imagery, and Tiramisu.^[23]

Otto was founded in January 2016 by Levandowski, Lior Ron, Claire Delaunay, and Don Burnette. Eleven Google employees also joined them.^[29] Otto retrofitted big rig trucks with self-driving kits.^{[30][31][32][29]} Levandowski stated he left Google because he, "was eager to commercialize a self-driving vehicle as quickly as possible."^[31] Otto was acquired by Uber in late July 2016, at which point Levandowski assumed leadership of Uber's driverless car operation.^{[33][34]} On May 30, 2017, Levandowski was fired from Uber. In July 2018 their autonomous trucking program was shut down.^[35]

In 2018, Levandowski launched Pronto AI to produce a camera-based, self-driving highway-only retrofit system for semi-trucks. As proof of concept, Levandowski claimed to have taken a modified self-driving Prius 3,100 miles (5,000 km) across the United States.^{[36][37][38]}

Civil lawsuit

According to a February 2017 civil lawsuit filed by Waymo officially known as *Waymo v. Uber* (Levandowski was not a defendant in the case),^[39] Levandowski allegedly "downloaded 9.7 GB of Waymo's confidential files and trade secrets, including blueprints, design files, and testing documentation"^{[40][41]} before resigning to found Otto.^{[42][43]} Google co-founder Larry Page was reluctant to file the suit. However, he was pushed over the edge when one of Waymo's suppliers inadvertently copied a Waymo engineer on an email of a schematic of Uber's Lidar design. Uber's design appeared to be almost identical to that of Waymo.^{[44]:234} The civil suit between Uber and Waymo was settled in February 2018 with Uber agreeing to pay Waymo 0.34% of its equity, valued at approximately \$245 million, and not to use the unit's technology.^{[39][45]}

Before filing its lawsuit against Uber in 2017, Google had separately taken Levandowski to private

arbitration over a contract dispute.^[46] On March 4, 2020, Levandowski filed for bankruptcy protection after the court confirmed an arbitration panel's ruling that Levandowski and his colleague Lior Ron had breached their employment contracts with Google by poaching employees for their startup. The panel found that Levandowski owed Google \$179 million—\$120 million accounted for the salary he received while at the company, and the remainder for interest and legal fees accrued.^[47]

On March 30, 2020, Levandowski filed a motion with a California bankruptcy judge to force Uber to honor its contractual obligation to indemnify Levandowski. At issue is the validity of the indemnification agreement that Uber, Levandowski, and Ron entered into pre-acquisition. According to a court document, “The indemnification agreement was structured to ensure that Mr. Levandowski would not be left unprotected against Google, which had inexhaustible resources to attack Mr. Levandowski.”^[48] Uber initially honored the agreement and covered both Levandowski and Ron's legal costs. However, in April 2018, days before the final arbitration hearing that resulted in Levandowski owing Google \$179 million, Uber informed him it would be seeking reimbursement for his defense costs, arguing he had breached their agreement by refusing to testify.^[48]

In March 2017, United States District Judge William Alsup referred the civil case to federal prosecutors, citing the Economic Espionage Act of 1996^[49] after Levandowski exercised his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.^[5] In May 2017, Judge Alsup ordered Levandowski to refrain from working on Lidar at Uber and required Uber to disclose its discussions on the technology.^[50] Levandowski was later fired by Uber for failing to cooperate in an internal investigation.^[51] Soon after the case went to trial, Uber, through its lawyers, publicly apologized for hiring Levandowski.^{[44]:255}

Criminal conviction and pardon

On August 27, 2019, Levandowski was charged by the Department of Justice for the alleged theft of trade secrets from Google's self-driving unit Waymo. In months before he left Google, the charges alleged Levandowski downloaded thousands of files from Waymo's predecessor, Project Chauffeur. The data allegedly included “critical engineering information about the hardware used on Project Chauffeur self-driving vehicles,” and that Levandowski transferred files onto his laptop before leaving the company. Following the indictment, Pronto, a new self-driving trucking company that Levandowski co-founded, announced that its Chief Safety Officer, Robbie Miller, would take over as CEO.^[52]

On March 19, 2020, Levandowski agreed to plead guilty to one of the thirty-three charges initially brought against him by the Department of Justice. Originally charged with stealing documents containing trade secrets, technical specifications, and Lidar design, Levandowski's pleaded guilty to downloading an internal project tracking document called, "Chauffeur TL Weekly – Q4 2015"—a spreadsheet consisting of team goals, project metrics, and weekly status updates accessible by Levandowski's team on an unsecured Google Drive. Levandowski admitted to accessing the document about one month after leaving Google in February 2016.^{[53][54][55]}

On August 4, 2020, Levandowski formally pleaded guilty to one count of trade secret theft, and Judge William Alsup sentenced him to 18 months in prison. Prosecutors agreed to drop the remaining 32 charges as a part of the plea agreement.^{[2][56][57][58][59]}

During the sentencing, Alsup said, “this is the biggest trade secret crime I have ever seen. This was not small. This was massive in scale.”^[2] He also described Levandowski as a "brilliant, groundbreaking engineer that our country needs. We need those people with vision. I'm going to give him that."^[60] In addition to time served, Levandowski was ordered to pay \$756,499.22 in restitution to Waymo and a fine of \$95,000.^[61]

On January 20, 2021, his last day in office, President Donald Trump granted a full pardon to Levandowski.^[62]

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