

Exclusive: Utah tech CEO tells 2News he welcomes an audit after privacy criticism

KUTV

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<https://kutv.com/news/local/exclusive-utah-tech-ceo-tells-2news-he-welcomes-an-audit-after-privacy-criticism>



SOUTH JORDAN, Utah (KUTV) — A Utah company is facing national scrutiny over its artificial intelligence that monitors live traffic cameras, dispatch logs and social media to help first responders.

Banjo, under [contract for \\$20.7 million with the state of Utah](#), is currently partnering with about 20 cities and counties in the state and is working to expand its reach.

The concern, in a handful of [recent national articles](#), stems from the company's access to a large amount of data that makes its product work.

The Utah Highway Patrol and the Utah Department of Transportation have granted the company access to more than 1,000 traffic cameras statewide. Some jurisdictions are also providing other real-time information, like location of first responders' vehicles and basic 911 data, including nature of the call, time and location.

Banjo's technology also tracks social media posts to help detect problems, like fires and crashes, before firefighters and police officers would otherwise know.

"It's literally just notifying them of what they would've found out already, just notifying them faster," said Damien Patton, CEO of Banjo.

Patton said his company is privacy-focused, with a wall of patents to demonstrate its commitment to protecting data and stripping out all personally identifiable information.

Banjo maintains all the information it collects is anonymized, and UDOT traffic videos are deleted after 24 hours.

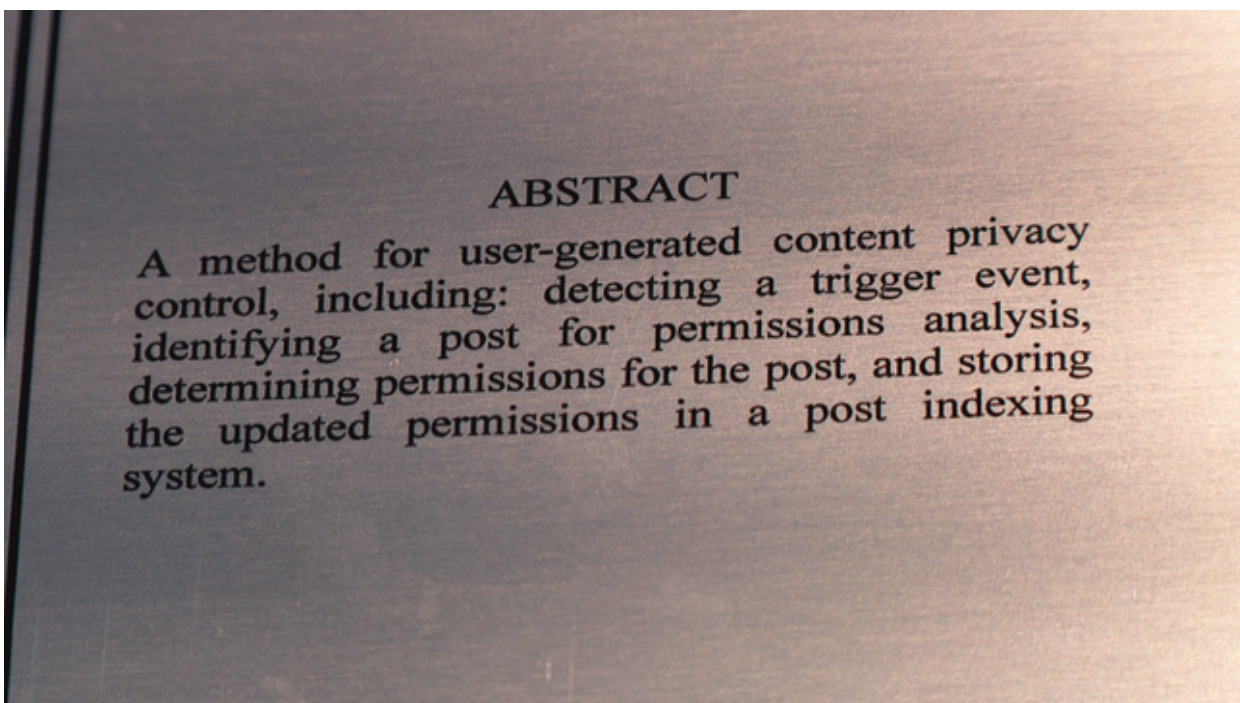
"We won't use facial recognition," he said. "We don't use license plate readers. We're using it to detect an anomaly like a car accident, like a car stopped on the shoulder of the freeway that might cause an accident or a secondary accident or debris in the road or a fire."



A Utah company is facing national scrutiny over its artificial intelligence that monitors live traffic cameras, dispatch logs and social media to help first responders. (Photo: KUTV)

Some lawmakers still have concerns. So does Jason Stevenson with the ACLU of Utah, who is pushing for legislation next year to ensure the data is kept safe.

“Any time you have a vast amount of public data, information, faces, videos of cars on streets, license plate data, all that collected in one place,” Stevenson said, “it becomes a target for hackers who might want to use it for nefarious purposes.”



A Utah company is facing national scrutiny over its artificial intelligence that monitors live traffic cameras, dispatch logs and social media to help first responders. (Photo: KUTV)

Patton encourages an audit of Banjo, and he calls for routine audits of all tech companies that do business with government agencies.

“We do not monitor people, period,” Patton said. “We detect events, and we use those events and get them to first responders to help save people’s lives and reduce human suffering.”



Damien Patton, CEO of Banjo (Photo: KUTV)

The CEO said Banjo has real-world success stories in Utah but none that he can share publicly yet. He hopes to secure permission from his customers in order to speak about them in the future.

When will Utahns see a return on their investment?

“I hope they see it very quickly,” Patton said. “Right now, I believe as quick as we’re getting the product out in the hands of first responders, every day is an opportunity to save someone’s life on the roadways, for example.”

The University of Utah is one institution partnering with Banjo. Spokesman Chris Nelson said in a statement:

The U’s Department of Public Safety is still in the early stages of operationalizing the system and working through the state and the company to determine how best to utilize it as part of our efforts to better coordinate our emergency coordination and communication with the state’s public safety infrastructure. (L)ike some of the other law enforcement partners on the state contract we’re approaching it very similarly in terms of access to dispatch and some cameras. We have also had conversations about potentially providing access to license plate readers at some point. Banjo came up in the wake of extensive internal and external reviews over the past few years around campus safety. Based on conversations with the state, we see it as a tool that could benefit university police in their investigative processes and ensure more seamless coordination and communication our law enforcement partners across the state. The university has no plans to provide Banjo with access to student or employee data.

The Salt Lake City Police Department issued a statement on Wednesday saying it will not be providing data to Banjo.



[SLC Police Dept.](#)

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Press Release: SLCPD Statement on Banjo

In an abundance of caution, SLCPD will not be providing data to Banjo.

"We take personal privacy very seriously." -@ChiefMikeBrown [http://www.slcpd.com/2020/03/11/press-release-slcpd-statement-on-banjo/ ...](http://www.slcpd.com/2020/03/11/press-release-slcpd-statement-on-banjo/)



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Point of clarification, we never did share data with Banjo.

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SLCPD Chief Mike Brown said in a prepared statement:

As law enforcement, we are hopeful for the assistance that a product like Banjo offers. But we do take personal privacy very seriously. The founding principles of this country include the rights of the individual and their privacy. Because of this we want to make sure we fully vet any product before sharing their information.

The department said it will continue to review the product that Banjo offers but as a department has discontinued its initial review of the company.