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Banjo CEO steps down as fallout from revelations of past ties to KKK continues

By Art Raymond | @DNTechHive | May 8, 2020, 5:26pm MDT



PARK CITY — Embattled event detection tech firm Banjo announced Friday that the company's current CEO and founder, Damien Patton, has resigned and the company will transition to a new leadership team with current Chief Technology Officer Justin R. Lindsey taking over the top position.

“I'm deeply honored to have worked alongside the Banjo team and am proud of all we have accomplished thus far,” Patton said in a statement. “I am confident Banjo's greatest days are still ahead, and will do everything in my power to ensure our mission succeeds. However, under the current circumstances, I believe Banjo's best path forward is under different leadership.”

Lindsey has been with the company for nine months and will be assuming his new responsibilities immediately.

“Nine months ago I was inspired by Banjo's mission to join the company full time as the CTO,” Lindsey said in a statement. “As CEO, I'm looking forward to continuing Banjo's dedication to technology solutions that protect privacy.”

When asked about what structural changes might be in store to ensure Patton's functional disconnection from the company, a Banjo spokesman described the former CEO's status as one in which he “is not an employee, no longer on the board and has no operating capacity on the company.”

Late last month, evidence was unveiled that tied Patton to a white supremacist group and acts of hate-motivated violence as a teenager.

Shortly after that news became public, the Utah Attorney General's Office announced that an audit already planned for the company was being moved up and an appropriate, third-party contractor was being sought to conduct the assessment. That review, which will be conducted by Utah State Auditor John Dougall's office, will not only include evaluations of personal privacy protections stipulated in the state's contract with Banjo, but will also be looking for any evidence of racial or religious bias in work already performed by the company.

Utah A.G. halts \$21 million Banjo contract as founder's past ties with KKK unveiled

Banjo pauses Utah contracts as AG Reyes launches audit for racial/religious bias following revelations of founder's white supremacist background

State auditor will tackle scan for 'algorithmic bias' following revelations of Banjo CEO's past ties with Ku Klux Klan

Last summer, the state struck a \$21 million contract with Banjo to aid first responders and law enforcement investigators in detecting incidents and crimes. The company says its technology can provide critical information and investigative direction by constantly gathering and processing massive amounts of data from multiple sources, including networks of video surveillance cameras, 911 call centers and emergency vehicle data that can be leveraged to get first responders to incidents faster and help solve crimes by saving police hours of old-fashioned detective work.

Dozens of Utah municipal agencies also entered into agreements with Banjo under state preferred-provider agreements. The state put its principal contract on hold following revelations of Patton's past and Banjo has since announced it stopped processing information related to its Utah clients pending the audit's outcome.

The University of Utah announced it had "officially terminated" its contract with Banjo on May 1. Previously, according to a statement by the U., the company had access to computer aided dispatch from the school's police department and about 50 campus surveillance cameras. The U. also said student and employee info was never shared with the company.

Court records and documents from federal hate crime investigations discovered in reporting posted by OneZero, a technology publication from online forum Medium, found that at 17 years old, Patton was involved with a faction of the Ku Klux Klan and participated in a drive-by shooting of a Nashville synagogue on June 9, 1990. According to court records, Patton was driving the vehicle on that day as a Klan leader shot out windows of the synagogue with a semi-automatic weapon. No one was injured in the incident, but the gunfire was directed at a building not far from where the congregation's rabbi was at the time.

While two Klansmen were later convicted of crimes related to the incident, Patton, according to Medium, pleaded guilty to acts of juvenile delinquency in connection with the incident. Patton also testified at the trial about his beliefs, at the time.

“We believe that the blacks and the Jews are taking over America, and it’s our job to take America back for the white race,” Patton testified.

Court documents reflect that Patton acknowledged attending white supremacist meetings and talks and admitted he was hiding out on a white supremacist compound following the synagogue shooting.

In a statement shared with the Deseret News, Patton expressed remorse for his actions earlier in life and asserted his involvement with hate groups and the violent acts he participated in are not a reflection of the person he has become.

“Thirty-two years ago I was a lost, scared and vulnerable child,” Patton said. “I won’t go into detail, but the reasons I left home at such a young age are unfortunately not unique; I suffered abuse in every form. I did terrible things and said despicable and hateful things, including to my own Jewish mother, that today I find indefensibly wrong, and feel extreme remorse for. I have spent most of my adult lifetime working to make amends for this shameful period in my life.

“In my teens, I dropped out of school, lived on the streets, ate out of dumpsters and raised money panhandling. I was desperate and afraid. I was taken in by skinhead gangs and white supremacist organizations. Over the course of a few years, I did many things as part of those groups that I am profoundly ashamed of and sorry about.

“Eventually, I was able to get myself away from this world while serving in the United States Navy. This turned my life around. While serving my country, I worked with law enforcement agencies in hate group prosecutions and left this world behind.

“Since then, I have tried and failed to completely accept and come to terms with how I, a child of Jewish heritage, became part of such a hateful, racist group. One thing I have done, through therapy and outreach, I have learned to forgive that 15-year-old boy who, despite the absence of ideological hate, was lured into a dark and evil world. For all of those I have hurt, and that this revelation will hurt, I’m sorry. No apology will undo what I have done.

“I have worked every day to be a responsible member of society. I’ve built companies, employed hundreds and have worked to treat everyone around me equally. In recent years, I’ve sought to create technologies that stop human suffering and save lives without violating privacy. I know that I will never be able to erase my past, but I work hard every day to make up for mistakes. This is something I will never stop doing.”



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