



Ex-Military Making the Weather in Automotive Cybersecurity

By Lynn Walford - January 2, 2019



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Israel is a hotbed for automotive cybersecurity firms. Auto Futures talked with some of the leading businesses in Israel to learn what atmosphere enabled it to be outstanding in this fast-growing sector.

The influence of Israel's military service is seen as significant, especially at Argus Cyber Security (Argus), a business owned by the German automotive supplier Continental.

"Our founders served in Israel Defense Forces' cyber intelligence unit 8200. It's kind of like the NSA in handling intelligence and cyber defense," says Yoni Heilbronn, Chief Marketing Officer of Argus who served a decade in leadership roles in the IDF's 8200. "8200 handles intelligence with the most cutting-edge technology."

Heilbronn says that in the military, you have to take responsibility, perform well under pressure and think outside of the box.

"In 8200, the impossible is really irrelevant," says Heilbronn who notes that in the Israeli military even the simplest rank-and-file can speak out to the highest commander if necessary and it is encouraged. "It's a culture in which people invent great things and great ideas after their discharge."

Currently about 40 to 50% of Argus' employees come from a military background. Many are ex-intelligence officers with the ability to make quick decisions under pressure, gather influence, come up the best course of action, execute large-scale projects and manage people, says Heilbronn. Argus started off over four years ago with about twenty people and the company has a portfolio of fifty patents and relationships with most automakers and Tier 1 suppliers.

He says that one of the best ways to recruit employees is through referrals. Many of the referrals come from connections made during military service. "You know you can trust the guy you served with," says Heilbronn, "and it fosters a spirit of innovation."

Mandatory service in the Israeli military helps mature people in technical fields and the Ministry of Defense gives tools and space to disrupt things. That's according to Dvir Reznik, Senior Marketing Manager of Automotive Cybersecurity HARMAN Connected Services.

"The kids are taught at the age of 18 to 19 how to break with custom," says Reznik. In fact, the three founders of TowerSec automotive security (acquired by HARMAN in 2016) knew of each other through the military. Co-founder Yuval Weisglass, started in 8200 and worked as research and development director for the Israel Ministry of Defense.

Besides good intelligence, businesses have to have good access to venture capital says Reznik. Israel has an international venture capital community with ties to industries all over the world.

HARMAN saw the great potential in three Israeli start-ups including over-the-air software (OTA) specialist Red Bend Software and iOnRoad augmented reality driving safety technology experts. Recently, HARMAN brought all of the three Israeli companies it acquired, including the former TowerSec entity, together under one roof at HARMAN's Connected Services building.



"It's a tight synergy of products, the automakers like it because we provide a full suite of services, certification and testing," says Reznik, who offers the example that one response to a security threat may require an over the air update which uses the Red Bend OTA technology.

"The beauty of the army is that you face challenges all the time. Israeli intelligence is legendary," says David Barzilai, CEO of Karamba Security. But he says that it takes more than than to succeed. "Companies have to develop a product and understand the landscape as well as scale to meet the needs of suppliers."

According to Barzilai, the knowledge to scale up to an international company can come from other successful publicly traded Israel companies. Companies such as Checkpoint (CHKP), Cy

Imperva (IMPV), enriches Israel's DNA in scaling products.

"Because we have the talent from Check Point, we have been able to scale quickly to meet the needs of our clients," says Barzilai. He adds that Karamba Security had to scale quickly to serve seventeen automotive customers.

Israel offers more amenities that contributed to the growth of automotive cybersecurity companies. "Israel has excellent, yet affordable, universities, a diverse population, and an innovative entrepreneurial culture," says Barzilai.

And last year's Smart Mobility Summit in Tel Aviv showed just why Israel is a red hot location for innovation and success in smart mobility.

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