

Uber's Levandowski Removes Himself from Self-Driving Car Technology



Summary: Anthony Levandowski's previous work with Google has placed Uber in a legal battle over the intellectual property regarding self-driving vehicles.

Anthony Levandowski left Google to end up at Uber. The executive has since been accused of stealing trade secrets. Now that the two tech giants are squaring off in a legal fight over those secrets, Levandowski is removing himself from Uber's work on self-driving vehicles.

As one of the self-driving-car industry's top engineers, Levandowski recused himself from working on Uber's lidar technology in an internal memo obtained by *Business Insider*. The light detection and ranging technology is a key aspect of the operation of an autonomous vehicle. Levandowski stated he will stop attending meetings and making decisions about lidar effects until the legal battle ends. In the memo, he said, "We should all be proud that our self-driving technology has been built independently, from the ground up. With this move, I hope to keep the team focused on achieving the vision that brought us all here."

The legal battle between Uber and Waymo, a spin-off self-driving-vehicle company from Google's parent company, has been heating up. Waymo sued the ride-hailing service in February for using their intellectual property. They allege that Levandowski downloaded documents when he was an executive at Google and used them at Uber. They are seeking an injunction to stop Uber's work until the issue is resolved. A judge is expected to rule on that request next week. If Uber's work towards self-driving cars is stopped, even for a short time, it would greatly affect their ability to beat others into the market.

While Levandowski's decision to distance himself from the technology makes it appear like Uber has done nothing wrong, legal experts question whether it will be effective. Rutgers Law School professor Michael Carrier said in an email to the New York Times, "Assuming a successful suit, Waymo could get damages for the period AL was involved. If the purloined documents are still accessible to, and can be implemented by, the rest of the team, his recusal makes no difference."

With Levandowski stepping away, Eric Meyhofer will take the lead. He is a principal at Uber's Advanced Technologies Group in Pittsburgh and will report to chief executive Travis Kalanick. Levandowski had reported to Kalanick but will now report to Meyhofer. He will still be in charge of handling the testing and operations of Uber's self-driving vehicle group.

So how did Levandowski get involved in the fight? He worked for Waymo for nearly ten years before leaving to start his own start-up, Otto. He soon after sold his company to Uber for \$680 million. Waymo claims that before Levandowski left them, he downloaded terabytes worth of proprietary research information of their lidar technology to take with him. Uber denies using any technology stolen from Waymo.

The race to be the first in the market of self-driving-vehicles has been increasing. Waymo announced their plan to test their driverless vehicles in Arizona as part of a partnership with Fiat Chrysler. General Motors purchased a start-up called Cruise Automation last year for \$1 billion cash and stock. They have also been working with Lyft, Uber's rival, to create a self-driving-vehicle network.

Others in the market include Tesla, who has their own version and Apple, who is working on a self-driving car project. Apple has faced large hurdles internally over the past year but recently obtained a permit to test their cars in California.

Would you take a taxi without a driver? Tell us in the comments below.

To learn more about self-driving cars, read these articles:

- [New Driverless Car from Google Does Not Have Steering Wheel or Brake Pedal](#)
- [California Rules Google's Self-Driving Cars Will Require Steering Wheels and Brake Pedals](#)
- [Tesla Owners Sue Automaker for Allegedly Faulty Enhanced Autopilot Feature](#)

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