

Client: Genetec

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## 22 Industry Interview

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# An industry trailblazer - 20 years on

Tim Compston, Guest Features Writer at Security News Desk, reports on the Genetec Connect T7 press summit and the thoughts of its outspoken President, CEO, and Founder, Pierre Racz, on the Canadian company's development, the wider state of the industry, and cybersecurity concerns.



It was a wintry scene that greeted me at the end of January when I landed at Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport in Montreal, Quebec, ahead of a two-day media event, with snow much in evidence. The summit, which took place at Genetec's corporate headquarters on the outskirts of Montreal, was timed to coincide with an impressive 20 years of innovation in the security industry. Two decades on, there is little doubt that Genetec has cemented its position as a pacesetter in the world of unified IP security platforms.

Andrew Elvish, Vice President of Marketing, kicked-off proceedings at the press summit by underlining the way Genetec is constantly reinventing how it does business and the solutions it offers. A case in point, said Elvish, was a completely new method of working, brought in just this year: "We reorganised how our teams function and interact with each other." Elvish explained that there is now an infrastructure team which builds all Genetec's core infrastructure platforms – like Omnicast, Synergis, AutoVu and Security Center – and new application-specific groups: "The application groups take all the infrastructure technology and SDK work and apply those to different end user challenges." In terms of the rationale for such a big change, Elvish said that the smaller self-functioning teams are nimbler in how they can address customer requirements: "We have really seen a ramp-up in our ability to get things to market quicker," he concluded.

### Action on privacy

Changing tack, with privacy a perennial issue for video surveillance it was great to gain an insight during the press summit into how this can, potentially, be addressed through video analytics. During his presentation on day one, Product Manager Stephan Sutor – who co-founded Kiwi Security and leads Genetec's Retail Application Group – pointed to the contradiction which is usually at play here: "You want more privacy but you have to sacrifice security or you want more security and you have to sacrifice privacy."

For Sutor, and his colleagues, the aim has been to come up with more 'creative and intelligent solutions' to 'bust this old contradiction', against the backdrop of recent privacy laws and directives passed in the European Union and similar policies in other parts of the world: "We need to deal with the fact that once we are putting cameras up and filming people we are entering their personal privacy," said Sutor.

On the question of whether it is enough to just blur an individual's face, from experience, Sutor feels that this alone is not sufficient: "Personal data isn't just your face, you can be identified by the way you walk, for example, or tattoos and jewellery, so we pixelate or blur the entire person." He explained that this process happens, automatically, in real-time so it is still possible to recognise actions, what people are doing, without giving up their identity: "It is only after the fact if something bad happens that 'super-users' can access the original video and export it for evidential purposes," he concluded.

### From accident to design

Catching-up with Genetec's Founder, Pierre Racz, on the side lines of the summit, and at the press dinner at Les Enfants Terribles – on the top floor of Montreal's tallest building – talk quickly turned to the technology landscape that prevailed in the early days of Genetec. Racz pointed out that back

then Internet Protocol (IP) was very much in its infancy and still, typically, used for point-to-point transmissions. Added to this video quality was limited by the resolution of NTSC or PAL formats.

Shedding some light on how the first version of Omnicast – Genetec's IP video surveillance software – came into being, Racz admitted that the way Genetec was drawn into IP video was almost by accident rather than design: "We were asked to architect a system by a company, subsidised by the National Research Council of Canada, and they eventually went bankrupt, leaving us with huge unpaid bills. And so we used the philosophy that when life hands you a lemon you make lemonade. Our recommendation for them was not to use a telecom architecture, with T1 lines, but a network architecture with IP connections."

From adversity, Racz recounted how his small team turned the situation around. Essentially, they took the software that had already been written, threw away 'all the stuff' that was connected to the client's proprietary hardware, and started again with off-the-shelf network, and off-the-shelf video compression, equipment: "That is how we built Omnicast 1.0 in 1997 and we made our first sale in 1998, and the rest is history," said Racz.

### Software focus

Warming to his theme, Racz stressed that software remains at the very heart of what Genetec does and is proud of how the company has shaken up the industry along the way: "When we started, the video [surveillance] industry was very hardware-centric. The players that made the hardware would give their software away and it was rubbish software at that. No one would pay for software." He told me that the tide has very much turned in Genetec's favour and that there is a greater appreciation today of 'software as a service' rather than simply an afterthought: "It is just like gardening, you have to weed it and water it and decide that you are going to rotate your crops. Software is the same thing, you do not buy a piece of software and it remains static." Added to this, Racz indicated that Genetec has always crafted its software architecture in a flexible way, an example being a move from 'zero Cloud' to 'the Cloud' in only nine months: "This is something that is going to be a key to our success now and for the next decade."





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## Montreal matters

Another pivotal element in Genetec's development, to date, said Montreal-native Racz is its geographical location: "We have lots of things that make this [Montreal] a really creative town. The fact that Quebec is an island of French means it is a bit more stable mobility-wise." In addition, Racz points to the large number of universities and the huge gaming industry which combine to support a vibrant development community, a community that Genetec can readily tap into.

Although Genetec has a global reach, on the first day of the summit it was good to have the opportunity to see at first hand the benefits that a solution, based around the Security Center platform, had unlocked for a nearby hospital, specifically the CHU Sainte-Justine, the largest mother-child centre in Canada, and the second biggest in North America. During the on-site visit, Julie Carpentier, the Head of Security and Emergency Preparedness at Saint-Justine - which is in the throes of a massive construction programme - was full of praise for the Genetec solution, thanks to its open architecture and, crucially, the fact that it can support new and existing infrastructure as the facility increases its cameras and doors.

## A cybersecurity debate

Returning to Pierre Racz, as the face of Genetec he is certainly not one to dodge controversy. Racz has been in

the headlines after the move by the company to place certain video surveillance cameras into a 'restricted' category over cybersecurity, and alleged state ownership worries, with those in his sights firmly refuting the claims.

Speaking at the press summit about his ongoing concerns over the ultimate origin of some technology, inside video surveillance cameras and potential 'backdoors', Racz was quick to draw an analogy with airport security and someone seeking to fly and being asked by the airline if they have packed their own bags: "If not, do you trust the person who packed your bags? If you can't answer that question your bags should not go on the plane."

Talking more broadly about where corporate responsibility fits into the cybersecurity picture, Racz warns that in the next ten years we can expect cybercriminal activity to surge to twice the level of regular criminal activity so radical action is required: "It [cyber] is less risk, higher reward, so we need to give incentives to people to properly take responsibility. We did that 10 years ago with Sarbanes-Oxley where we said to the president of a company that if it produces false financial reports then 'you are going to jail'. Well, you have to do the same sort of thing here. When you put in 'garbage' technology on the network, that either can lose money for your shareholders or, even worse, destroy parts of society around you, then you are going to jail. This is the sort of incentive we need so executives will pay attention to cybersecurity."

## Investing for the future

Away from the cybersecurity debate, Racz told me at the press summit that maintaining an agile business model - and a strong commitment to R&D - are helping to drive Genetec forward: "We have zero external investors. We bootstrapped ourselves up from zero and so we are not beholden to anybody.

As a result, we can take long-term decisions that financial people might throw out." He cited the example of Genetec's move into LPR (License Plate Recognition) with AutoVu which was in his words 'a long slog' but an area today where the company is a leading player.

Racz believes that the vendor is well placed to keep up the momentum it has generated on the solutions front with two new additions, Mission Control, the company's decision support system, and Clearance, a collaborative case management solution. For Racz, Genetec is no longer just about 'pixels': "In fact we are more about operational efficiency so all the tools that we bring to help you with operational efficiency eventually have some tie-in with pixels. The way I like to explain it is that we take unstructured information, which is basically your pixels, and we index them and marry them with structured information which comes from access control or process control or operations. Combining the two removes unknowns and that is how we create value," he said.

Turning to the future trajectory of Genetec's business, two-decades on, Pierre Racz and the Genetec team were able to demonstrate that the vendor remains in rude health by flagging up the construction work that was much in evidence during my visit alongside an ever-expanding global footprint: "We are growing. In 2017, we expect to welcome our 1,000th employee in one of our nine offices worldwide," Racz confirmed.

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## 16 Events

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### **Intersec Saudi Arabia 2017 opens in Jeddah featuring 150 exhibitors from 25 countries**

The first ever Intersec Saudi Arabia takes place from 2-4 May in Jeddah, with more than 150 exhibitors from 25 countries turning their attention to the Middle East's largest commercial security and fire safety market, which, according to analysts Frost & Sullivan, was worth US\$5.4 billion in 2016.

Intersec Saudi Arabia's launch partners include Hikvision, Dahua, Axis Communications, Nedap, Milestone, Bristol, CP Plus, dormakaba, Draeger, Genetec, Hanwha Techwin, Harco Group, HID, NAFFCO, Pelco by Schneider Electric, Promise Technology, Smiths Detection, and Nitin Fire Protection Industries. They're joined by key local players Al-Alameya Group and ZMR Technology Distribution.

According to organisers, the annual three-day event will also feature country pavilions from India, China, and the Czech Republic, while the Safety Design in Buildings Conference on 2 May, and the Intersec Middle East Security Forum from 3-4 May puts a dual spotlight on security upgrades and construction safety as part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030.

The Commercial Security section is spearheaded by the likes of Hikvision and Dahua, along with Axis Communications, Nedap, and Milestone. They and many others are looking to claim a big stake in a country that spent US\$695 million on access control, video surveillance, intrusion detection systems, and video analytics in 2016, show organisers, Messe Frankfurt Middle East said.

Mugees Ahmed, the Regional Marketing Manager for Milestone, which specialises in video surveillance and Video Management Systems (VMS), said: "We're delighted to join Intersec Saudi Arabia 2017 as the Saudi market is a very interesting market for our product. We believe that Milestone, as the number one VMS manufacturer can contribute to the security on the Saudi market with our Open Community approach."

Firas Jadalla, Regional Director in the Middle East and Africa for Genetec, which offers IP video surveillance, access control and license plate recognition, added: "Our objectives for Intersec Saudi Arabia include reinforcing the Genetec brand in the Saudi market, as well as demonstrating and previewing technologies and trends that are shaping the physical security industry."

Intersec Saudi Arabia is one of ten Messe Frankfurt-organised trade fairs and events dedicated to the worldwide safety and security sector, and the second in the Middle East after the Group's flagship show, Intersec in Dubai, UAE. It presents a comprehensive overview of the entire safety, security and fire protection industries.