

Former Google engineer agrees to plead guilty to secrets theft

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A Waymo self-driving car. The allegations against Levandowski came out when Waymo accused Uber of stealing trade secrets

A former Google star engineer charged with stealing trade secrets from its self-driving car program has agreed to plead guilty in a deal with

prosecutors, according to court documents filed Thursday.

Anthony Levandowski, 39, was a founding member of an autonomous vehicle project in 2009 called "Chauffeur," one of Google's more ambitious undertakings.

Several years later Levandowski began thinking of leaving Google for another self-driving endeavor that was eventually named "Otto," the plea deal said.

He began negotiating with ridesharing giant Uber to invest in or buy Otto while he was still working at Google, and admits having downloaded a whole series of documents a few months before his resignation in January 2016.

"Prior to my departure, I downloaded thousands of files related to Project Chauffeur," Levandowski said in [court documents](#).

Levandowski was leader of the light-detecting and ranging (LiDAR) team when he resigned from Google without notice.

The technology is important for [self-driving cars](#) to measure distances and avoid obstacles.

Levandowski will plead guilty to a count of theft and attempted theft of trade secrets in exchange for prosecutors dropping the rest of the charges filed against him, the court filing showed.



Former Google engineer Anthony Levandowski admits downloading thousands of files before he resigned from Google

He could face up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine under sentencing guidelines, but a federal judge would be free to determine the punishment.

"All of us have the right to change jobs, none of us has the right to fill our pockets on the way out the door," US attorney David Anderson said in a release announcing the original counts of theft and attempted [theft](#) of trade secrets last year.

"Theft is not innovation."

The allegations came out in a civil case in which Google's self-driving car division, now renamed Waymo and under its parent Alphabet, accused Uber of stealing [trade secrets](#).

That case ended with a settlement between the two firms last year.

Levandowski was fired by Uber in 2017 as the two firms were preparing to go to court on the civil trial.

Levandowski has filed for bankruptcy, citing listing Google among his creditors and noting a legal claim against him totaling about \$179 million, according to US bankruptcy [court](#) filings.

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