Dear Friends,

We are excited to bring you the second edition of Doing Business in Israel for 2021. In the Covid-era, between flight restrictions and fluctuating procedures, traveling is no longer a given. With that in mind, we decided to dedicate this edition of Doing Business in Israel to the local Travel Tech sector and the incredible work being done to make travel possible once again.

Israeli Travel Tech features over 300 startups specializing in every link of the travel chain - from booking and airport check-in to post-trip assistance. In light of the pandemic, many of these startups have channeled their creativity and unique technological developments into helping the travel sector bounce back as safely and quickly as possible.

On the impressive list of exciting startups to look at in the post-Covid era, perhaps none is more intriguing than SeeTrue. The Israeli startup uses a novel AI approach to revolutionize the current security screening process, cost effectively shortening and speeding up security lines and combating overcrowding in airports. We spoke with SeeTrue CEO, Assaf Frenkel, about the startup’s unexpected rise during the pandemic.

In addition, we reviewed the latest Israeli business transactions. As you will soon see, the SPAC craze, which has taken over the business world, did not pass over Israel. More and more local startups are choosing the trending route over a traditional IPO.

Our innovation and cultural bite segments are also back as usual. Learn about the latest Israeli development that seeks to solve one of the most acute problems autonomous vehicle manufacturers face, and join a traditional Passover gathering online from wherever you are.

We wish you a pleasant read!

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The Flood of SPACs Continues - And More Israeli Companies Are Riding the Wave

The hottest business trend did not pass over Israel. In the last quarter, Fintech startup Payoneer and auto-tech company Otonomo announced they were going public through SPAC deals, at a $3.3 billion and $1.4 billion valuation, respectively. Israeli blank check company Moringa recently raised $100 million on Nasdaq and will now look for an Israeli tech company to merge with.

Israeli Online Genealogy Platform MyHeritage Acquired by Francisco Partners for $600 Million

MyHeritage provides an online platform that allows users to build a family tree and learn more about their ancestry and family history. It recently launched a tool that uses AI to color old black-and-white photos, gaining worldwide attention. After 18 years, the company was acquired by California-based private equity firm Francisco Partners for an estimated $600 million.

Palo Alto Networks Acquires Israeli Startup Bridgecrew for $156 Million

Only 2 years into its existence, Israeli startup Bridgecrew was acquired by Israeli-American cyber giant, Palo Alto Networks. Bridgecrew, which developed a platform that identifies infrastructure errors and bridges the gap between cloud security and developers, will join several other Israeli startups that were previously acquired by the large cyber company.
"Technological Leaps Happen When There Is a Need... And The Need Was Never Greater Than It Is Now"

We have all stood in a security line at the airport and wished we could be done with it already. A group of Israelis took this tedious experience and turned it into SeeTrue, one of the most intriguing Travel Tech startups in the world. A conversation follows with Co-Founder & CEO Assaf Frenkel about security, technology and traveling in the post-Covid-19 era
The Covid-19 pandemic sent the tourism world into an unprecedented crisis, with losses estimated at over $2 trillion in global GDP, according to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Ever since that initial blow, the sector has been searching for ways to recover quickly, efficiently and safely. In their quest to find the best solutions to pull the sector out of its hole, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UNWTO found an answer in SeeTrue - an Israeli startup that promises to shorten security checks, saving travelers time and airports money, without sacrificing safety.

SeeTrue’s technology embeds directly into existing screening equipment and identifies threats in real time. “In the first weeks of the crisis when the airports were closed, the market was hit hard, but we quickly understood that our technology is more relevant now than ever. Security checks as they are run today cause bottlenecks; by shortening lines we solve the problem of overcrowding in the airport.” When SeeTrue started thinking of their product in the context of Corona, they turned a challenge into an opportunity. “Covid provided the necessary boost for a market that realized that automation is a must. Technological leaps happen when there is a need... and the need was never greater than it is now.”

SeeTrue was founded three years ago in Tel Aviv, but the idea that started it all was developed much earlier, almost as an afterthought. Frenkel recounts, “Avihood Ben-Ari, SeeTrue’s Chairman and a co-founder, was waiting at the gate with friends. They looked at the security personnel and wondered, “what would happen if someone slipped them some money - what are the chances that our plane would...”

The real connection is between technology, innovation and an approach that seeks to optimize processes instead of taking them as they are. This characterizes the Israeli DNA.
blow up?” Luckily, the flight landed safely and the idea for SeeTrue was born. Years after this seemingly banal conversation, and with the development of AI, the company was established with the goal of automating the security process.

“For the travelers, security is a necessary evil. Instead of spending time in the commercial area of the airport, they’re stuck in line.” Travelers may not be able to see the SeeTrue technology, but they will be able to feel it. “Instead of predicting where you’re more likely to be held up or which airports are stricter than others, you’ll see fewer security personnel and you’ll be stopped less.”

But the efficiency that Frenkel is talking about is not just for the traveler. “The commercial area, which includes restaurants and stores, makes for 30% of the airport’s income. When people stand in line, the airport loses money. Additionally, big airports can spend over 150m Euros a year on security personnel. If you can automate this process and provide the same level of security, it’s a win-win for everyone - the traveler, the airport and the regulator.”

“The transition from human to technology raises natural fears” says Frenkel, “the current system, with overloaded workers and limited training hours, requires an upgrade no matter what.” A few years ago, in empirical surprise tests, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) auditors managed to pass weapons in several US airports in 95% of the times. In December 2019, a TSA whistleblower conveyed concerns regarding how TSA reduces wait time by relaxing security. Frenkel added “SeeTrue offers a system that discovers over 90% of threats, and unlike a person, our technology does this 24/7 without getting tired.”

The Israeli Connection

Despite the country’s small population, you can find Israelis traveling in nearly any place in the world - many of them on their customary post-army trip. In a way, traveling is an inherent part of Israeli culture, and in the absence of open borders, most travel is by air. According to Frenkel, beyond the natural connection between travel and Israeli identity, there is also a natural connection between Travel Tech and Israel: “The real connection is between technology, innovation and an approach that seeks to optimize processes instead of taking them as they are. This characterizes the Israeli DNA, and you can find it in the travel sector as well. That’s the reason that Travel Tech naturally works here.”

According to Frenkel, the Israeli Travel Tech sector is growing, both in terms of investors and companies. And as we all look forward to a quick return to traveling normalcy, SeeTrue and other local Travel Tech startups aim to make our new norm safer, more efficient and more convenient than ever before.
Autonomous vehicles are a key feature when imagining future travel. Still, they haven’t yet been given the green light, mainly due to safety concerns and rigorous safety-related regulations, which require that autonomous vehicles implement two sensory modalities that operate simultaneously to provide similar information and keep vehicles safe in case of malfunction. In most cases, autonomous vehicles employ some combination of cameras, radar and LiDAR.

At the heart of autonomous vehicles lies the concept of road segmentation. Referring to the vehicle’s ability to interpret sensory data and identify its surroundings, segmentation is the basis of numerous planning and decision-making algorithms. A central processing system operating on an artificial neural network (ANN) can easily receive and process images taken by a camera. But the system is largely ineffective when trying to process blurry radar images.

A recent study conducted by Bar-Ilan University researchers, Prof. Zeev Zalevsky, Dr. Moshik Cohen and Itai Orr, show that this problem can be solved by attaching a camera to the radar and using images from the camera as practice for the radar’s ANN. The researchers found that by using this method, the network is able to successfully classify radar images and use that information for successful road segmentation.

The full study - named *High-resolution radar road segmentation using weakly supervised learning* - can be found in the online journal *Nature Machine Intelligence*. 
One of the first effects Covid-19 had on our lives was the major shift we saw toward digitalization in about every field of life. From work to education, everything is stored on a cloud and presented to us online. Interestingly, this trend didn’t skip even the arguably most conservative field - religion.

As Jews around the world get ready to celebrate Passover for a second time during the Covid-era, many won’t be able to travel and join their friends and families. For those who miss the communal feeling of the holiday, want to hear the blessings or are just curious - more and more synagogues offer live streaming of the first night of Passover, aka the Seder Night.

Simply search for live streaming online and join millions around the world who come together to celebrate this festive time, sing and tell the story of the Exodus and eat traditional foods.
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