

The Future of Business in Pittsburgh

November 2021

Argo AI to Begin Autonomous Deliveries with Walmart

Pittsburgh-based self-driving technology company Argo AI has announced that they will begin using autonomous vehicles to make deliveries to Walmart customers by the end of 2021. “Our focus on the testing and development of self-driving technology that operates in urban areas where customer demand is high really comes to life with this collaboration,” said Bryan Salesky, Argo AI founder and CEO. “We’re showing the potential for autonomous vehicle delivery services at scale.”



Argo AI has joined with Ford and Walmart to pilot autonomous vehicle deliveries

The vehicles being used in these deliveries are from Ford, which announced in 2017 that it would invest \$1 billion into Argo AI with the goal of having the company support Ford’s autonomous vehicle development and production. German automaker Volkswagen joined in with an additional \$2.6 billion investment in 2019, featuring \$1 billion in funding as well as Volkswagen’s \$1.6 billion Autonomous Intelligent Driving (AID) company. The location of AID in Munich, Germany then became Argo AI’s European headquarters. This deal valued Argo AI at \$7.5 billion as of mid-2020.

Argo AI was originally founded in November 2016 by Salesky and Peter Rander , two roboticists formerly affiliated with the National Robotics Engineering Center at Carnegie Mellon University. Salesky, a University of Pittsburgh graduate, had previously worked for Google’s autonomous vehicle program, as well as working in Pittsburgh for Union Switch & Signal. Originally founded by George Westinghouse in 1881, Union Switch & Signal was later acquired by Ansaldo STS, which today operates as a subdivision of Hitachi Rail STS.

Today Argo AI, which is still headquartered in Pittsburgh, employs more than 1,400 people and is currently testing autonomous vehicles on public roads in Pittsburgh and beyond. You can find out more at <https://www.argo.ai/>.

AvaDynamics Excels in ANA Avatar XPRIZE Competition

Pittsburgh-based AvaDynamics has been named as one of 15 teams advancing to the finals round of the \$10M ANA Avatar XPRIZE competition. Sponsored by All Nippon Airways (ANA), Japan's largest airline, the Avatar XPRIZE is a four-year global competition focused on the development of a physical avatar system capable of creating a sense of physical presence not just for the robotic avatar operator, but also for those interacting with the avatar. Additionally, the avatar system must also be capable of transporting a user's skills and abilities, including the ability to provide care or respond to emergency situations.

"The possibility of living in a world where individuals can provide aid during a crisis in a different country without ever leaving the comfort of their homes is closer than ever," said Anousheh Ansari, CEO of XPRIZE.



Fifteen teams made it to the ANA Avatar XPRIZE finals

Semifinals testing, which took place in September 2021, required teams to demonstrate their ability to execute tasks across a variety of real-world scenarios. The finals are expected to take place in the second half of 2022.

"We are very excited to have 15 teams safely moving forward to the ANA Avatar XPRIZE Finals, despite current COVID-19 restrictions," said Junko Yazawa, Senior Vice President of All Nippon Airways. "We are really proud of their achievements so far with their innovative Avatar technology that will most definitely be an important part of our future in travel and human connections. We look forward to witnessing our dreams come true as the teams showcase their Avatars once again for the finals."

The Advisory Board of the ANA Avatar XPRIZE features multiple people affiliated with Carnegie Mellon University, including Martial Hebert, Roberta Klatzky, and Illah Nourbakhsh. AvaDynamics is composed of Billy Zelsnack, Turing Zelsnack, Daniel Goncharov, Joseph Martin, and Terry Rorison.

Pittsburgh Business News and Updates

- ViralMoment wins 1st Place at Pitt, CMU-backed Eradicate Hate Global Summit (<https://technical.ly/pittsburgh/2021/10/19/anti-hate-technology-venture-fair/>)
- Excitement builds for new Pittsburgh airport terminal (<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/new-pittsburgh-airport>)
- DoorDash to open engineering office in Pittsburgh, calls city “key to DoorDash’s expansion strategy” (<https://technical.ly/pittsburgh/2021/10/22/doordash-engineering-offices/>)
- Amazon Prime Air co-founder joins Near Earth Autonomy Board of Directors (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1h-XKUCxZTSplEUYlpc7OJ7DNhmHzCES6/view>)
- Surgical robotics company Smith+Nephew opens new Pittsburgh R&D center (<https://www.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/inno/stories/news/2021/10/29/smith-nephew-opens-r-and-d-center-strip-district.html>)



About Ryan

Ryan O'Shea is a JETRO Investment Advisor focused on connecting Japanese companies to opportunities in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is the host of Future Grind, a podcast that explores the ethics and impact of emerging science and technology. In 2017, Ryan co-founded an artificial intelligence startup that was named a Top 10 team in the IBM Watson AI XPRIZE. Ryan has represented NASA and CalTech's Jet Propulsion Laboratory as a Solar System Ambassador and serves both as a World Economic Forum Global Shaper and an ambassador for Pittsburgh AI. He is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh & serves on the boards of multiple non-profit organizations. He can be reached at Ryan@futuregrind.org.