

Dataminr - Regional Security Specialist at Google

Interview conducted on January 13, 2022

Regional Security Specialist at Google, a customer of Dataminr. The expert was a core user who was leveraged to trial and consult on several alternatives including Dataminr and its alternatives.

Regional Security Specialist at Google. The expert is responsible for watching any threats and monitoring real-time incidents that could affect the physical safety of employees or facilities.

Prior to Google, the expert was the Senior Security Threat Analyst, Global Security Center at Uber, leaving November 2020. The expert is responsible for enabling and implementing safe and secure innovation while protecting the communities we serve both online and in the physical world.

The expert can speak about Everbridge, Lumina, Citizen, Liferaft, Navigator

Q: (Customers): Are you a customer of Dataminr, or any other similar solution?

A: Yes. I have used Dataminr and other first alerting products, such as Factal, Liferaft, Everbridge VCC, as well as other manned solutions, such as NC4, TAMC-C, Worldcue, and others.

Q: (Customers): Were you the final decision maker to work with Dataminr? If not, were you a part of the evaluation process? When was it you made this decision (year)?

A: I have not been a decision maker for either of the last two companies that used Dataminr. However, in my previous company, my role as a core user was leveraged to trial and consult on several alternatives.

Q: (Customers): What is your ballpark annual spend on Dataminr?

A: I was not privy to exact expenditure figures; however, it was clear that cost was a significant factor in the evaluation of alternatives.

Tegus Client

Thanks for taking the time to speak. Just to hop right in, I'm conducting some research on a space where vendors are providing real-time update/alerts on events and how essential companies use them for risk management purposes, vendors such as Dataminr and Factal, but those are the kind of vendors I'm trying to better understand.

Particularly on this call, I want to kind of dig into Dataminr given that, from my notes, that you have used this product. I want to understand the value proposition to users of this product and how it kind of compares and contrasts to other products in the industry, such as Everbridge or Lumina and Factal as well.

And before we kind of jump into the questions that I prepared, it would be helpful I think to just get a quick background on yourself and kind of like what your role was with Google and how you kind of use some of these products.

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes, certainly. So I've been in the, I guess you could call it, security analysis field for some time now. Spent a lot of time looking into first alerting, conducting briefs on open source intelligence. And also just evaluating different vendors for first alerting solutions.

And then now at Google, it's very similar in my role in that I'm using all of these products simultaneously. Google being a much larger company isn't so much about competing for the best services but using all of

them and seeing how they can even complement each other, whether we're using it for first alerting or for background information on situations that could impact the company's assets around the globe.

But yes, I'd say I probably have the most familiarity with Dataminr, but I've certainly been able to have the privilege to use Factual, LifeRaft and some of the other vendors, Everbridge VCC as well as some of the manned solutions as well.

Tegus Client

That's helpful. So can you talk about how you were using this product, like what is the kind of the goal there? Like essentially, what are you trying to accomplish?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. So I mean, being in a GSOC, the security operation center, really, you're the first line of defense for the company. So because you are a 24/7 operation, we leverage that availability to point out things as soon as they happen.

And so what's essential for that function is to have tools that enable you to receive alerts in a way that's passive because it's sort of untenable to think that you're going to be on all of the new sites, constantly refreshing for new information, tying it to a distance from your assets or from a product that you have out in the open world and be able to analyze that.

And so these tools, what they hope to do is they help to just aggregate a lot of what's out there and then sort of tie it to news that you sort of program into the product, whether if a manager wants to know all of the incidents happening within a mile of a certain asset. You can certainly use geofence to limit your results to that specification.

Or if, for example, at Uber where they care about the riders and drivers all over a city, so distance wasn't as much of a factor, but you're looking more for news that affect transport. Any sort of police activity that would cause some sort of road closure where it's a very different impact to the core business. Dataminr is flexible enough and some of the other tools they have that sort of flexibility that you can change the criteria for what you're looking for.

That's really helpful. You are able to adjust it on the fly if your needs change from that, say, monitoring any event. You can make a new sort of query for that type of event or to monitor for executive movements or anything like that. And so that's where these products can be really helpful and adaptable to the company's core mission as a security organization.

Tegus Client

That's helpful. If you would have think about like what is the value prop like what are you taking away from this product, how would you describe it? Like obviously, it helps you alert executives or your human capital and whatnot. But in your words, what is the value prop for this particular product.

I would like to understand how long you've been using this product. But before using this product, you guys were still kind of aiming to solve the problems you were trying to solve today. How were you doing that?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. So I'll start with the value proposition. Definitely human capital time is the major sort of factor there, but also flexibility and adaptability, all the things that I've sort of mentioned. It really becomes invaluable and that you have a tool that's been able to adjust as well as you may ask an analyst to. And so I think for major corporations like the ones that I've worked for, it's kind of essential to have the sort of first alerting tools because you do end up having to act in real time.

So for example, Uber is very cognizant of being perceived as potentially price gouging and sort of crisis incidents. And so the security team would ensure that surge was to a certain amount any time something

was going on.

So that, one, you'd still have supply for anyone in the area who would need assistance, but at the same time, being mindful of what the public perception is. And to implement that, you have to act in real time.

And from a public perception standpoint, the potential losses from those incidents were huge. And so, yes, I mean, there's definitely the value that you need from the product there. And it's applicable to different lines of businesses as well.

Companies, as they go through IPOs, people are sort of tracking the movements of executives and see who they're meeting with, with investors and information that's getting out there. And so you need some tools to be able to see what's being said in real time. And that goes into like insider trading and insider threats and things like that.

But there's more applications to it than just the security ones, for business intelligence and things like that. But definitely, when we get to a certain size, it definitely becomes, I believe, more of a necessity than anything else or it would be crazy to not have it.

Tegus Client

Yes. I mean, I just would kind of love to understand how long you've been using this product. But before people used Dataminr, everybody is still aiming to solve the same problems you are solving today with Dataminr.

How were those problems being solved without Dataminr? What I'm trying to understand is like if Dataminr wasn't there, how do you deliver the same solution, which I kind of want to understand like how important this solution is now going forward?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes, absolutely. So that's actually a really good question because in 2014, it was, in a sense, easier and harder to find information in the sense that, for example, Facebook APIs weren't as strict as they were now and it was a lot easier to scrape their posts using geolocation.

For example, we used 1 tool called Geofeedia, which allowed you to essentially place a geofence anywhere and pull all of the posts that are coming from a certain area because it was so much easier to scrape for content from the web back then.

And now that it's become more private, Dataminr and other tools, they've had to go to Facebook and request certain permissions and become a lot more creative about how they're going to be able to pull the content that is there. It's definitely a lot more sophisticated on the back end. I won't pretend to know what exactly is going on there.

But yes, it's probably easier to like start a company and pull that data before. Whereas now, the layers have really been limited to those who have been able to partner with the large social media companies and being able to build those partnerships to maintain that level of access.

Tegus Client

Understood, how does Dataminr's solution kind of compare to some of its peers, right? Would love to understand, have you used some of the other products and kind of want to understand how Dataminr is better/where some of the gaps are.

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. I mean, so we've trialed several of Dataminr's competitors, mostly because Dataminr has come to a place where they sort of are the major company and they've been able to build accordingly. So I think companies are very interested and they're looking for competitors.

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So for example, Factual, the team from Factual, they used to run a website called breakingnews.com, where it was conglomeration of reporters from around the world who'd share stories before I think, it's the indicated level for when they could publish, where they saw developing stories that they were able to share that content online freely.

And me as a user, back in 2014, I could go on that website, see what was developing before, I guess, a certain level of confirmation and then once it got to that level of confirmation, the others would place sort of like a mark on that story and indicate that it was verified with multiple sources, then we go ahead and run with it.

Unfortunately, NBC bought breakingnews.com back in I think it was 2015, 2016 and then shut it down. But those same makers, they made Factual, which is now a paid service. Sort of the same concept, you get sort of curated stories from journalists. So you have some trust in that what's being posted out there, is it noise?

That's one of the major problems with a lot of the solutions, is that they are incredibly noisy. But because it's manned, it's not going to be as quick as Dataminr, whereas algorithm does the same thing where it aggregates stories through various indications of chatter. And when it gets to a certain level, it sort of qualifies them as urgent, indicating what the trust level is for a certain story. And it's just going to be faster than what a human could do. And it's going to pull more stories, with breakingnews.com being essentially based in North America and Europe, a lot of the stories tend to be sort of Euro and American-centric, whereas with Dataminr, you can sort of ensure you're pulling from different sources.

And you are able to get the information that you want with less sort of bias as well. So that's just a heads up of like the pros and cons costs between Factual and Dataminr. What I find is that other solutions, ISOS, NC4, those are also manned solutions. They have centers that are pushing out alerts to the GSOCs all over the world. What I find is that they're actually using Dataminr to push out those same stories. So it's sort of like a secondhand Dataminr.

Again, you have the company's reputation that sort of stands by the alerts that they put out with various level of authentications or a sort of qualifying degrees of trustworthiness for each of the alerts that they put out. And so obviously, if you can use Dataminr on your own and you have the human capital for someone to be monitoring it, that may not be something that your company may be looking for.

And then finally, there's other solutions that also rely on social listening, like LifeRaft, Skopenow. Those I find to be less sort of first alert worthy, but it's more of they allow you to dig deeper into stories, sort of looking backward as opposed to what's going on in the here and now in a certain location.

Like with LifeRaft, for example, if I knew a situation that was going to happen, say, a planned protest, I can look backwards to see what previous protests were like based off the connections that you find between organization leaders and their past movements and things of that interest. So I think people often like to compare them, but they're really more complementary, in my opinion.

Tegus Client

That's helpful, do you know of all the data sources that Dataminr's pulling its information from? I guess, do you care?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. I understand that they pull from social media sites like Snapchat, Instagram, also through Reddit and Weibo, as well as local media and local government sources, what tends to be pretty big, especially outside of Europe and North America, where you're relying on sort of local reporting for things because the social media presence just isn't there.

But yes, they'll let you know what sourcing it is. And what's good is they also indicate the degrees of how much you can depend on each of the sources. They'll flag it by like certain indicators, whether there's only one source for an incident or what have you. But yes, I think they are pretty transparent about where they pull it from.

Tegus Client

That's helpful. Do you feel that Dataminr kind of provides you with some kind of competitive advantage versus like using another vendor? And like particularly at Google, you're probably not monetizing by using this particular product.

But maybe at your previous company, when some kind of these real-time alerts happened, there was price surcharges. But I kind of want to understand, is there some kind of competitive advantage involved by using this product over another one?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. I mean, I do feel like it has the most robust sort of program. So I don't want to say fancy, but there's a high likelihood that you'll get what you're looking for if you're using Dataminr, and you'll get it pretty quickly as well. So in the sense that time is money, and then if you move the information fast, then yes, certainly, I do think that there is an advantage to using the sort of best product on the market.

Tegus Client

That's helpful. I guess, were you involved in kind of bringing this to Google? Or was it already there by the time you went there?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

No. I mean, Google is a pretty mature, they have a pretty mature security org. So they have relationships with a lot of these vendors already. It's a public company now, but it's still sort of a very young company, at least in the mindset of its employees, very much like a start-up.

So there's definitely competition in sort of which vendors it uses, whether it's going to be one or another. So there's definitely a lot more piloting of vendor programs that goes along. And I was very lucky to have been a part of those discussions. I trialed Factual. I trialed Everbridge VCC. I trialed WatchKeeper, which Dataminr eventually ended up buying, and Lumina and plenty of others as well.

I trialed LifeRaft, Skopenow because the company was interested in seeing if you could do without Dataminr or there was a way to maybe figure out what features about the services that we would like and see if we can integrate that into an in-house solution. But yes, definitely, there is plenty of opportunity to bring on new vendors and understand what different solutions we've seen brought to the table.

Tegus Client

Yes. I'm sure there's several vendors that are trying to pitch you guys to use them. I guess what criteria are you guys using in this particular set of vendors, understanding which one you want to work with versus not working with them?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. And again, I'll speak to my experience at my previous company. And so the good thing about that company is it was mindful of the user itself. I think a lot of security companies, they like a lot of the bells and whistles, a lot of the maps, that they could put up on the big screens or whatever.

But as a user, I made sure that our team's focus was on getting relevant alerts in a manner that was quick, in a manner that didn't involve have them getting through several different panes and windows, in a manner that didn't take up monitor real estate, which is key when we're already monitoring several other things as a part of our role in a security operation.

So I made sure that those things were at the forefront of our valuation of these vendors. We got pitched a lot of things like dark web scraping to make sure that we could pull all of the information. But a lot of what I find

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is that a lot of the results we get are indexed in a way that's really not helpful. You end up going through a ton of webpages. The tool that we used to be useful to our team. And so, yes, for me the most important thing is just to be able to get information out in a way that's quick, in a way that's usable, in a way that it can be manipulated and adapted to the different situations that we monitor.

So with that, we rolled out kind of products that they were selling to executive with a lot of the extras. But what we also found is that the vendors that really wanted our business, they were receptive to what our needs were. And they actually made changes to their own products to accommodate our needs, and Dataminr was one of them.

They were really receptive to some of the specific criteria that we needed for monitoring road conditions and particular events that would be of interest to the company and the actions that we took. They went to a lot of the concept that we couldn't find due to APIs.

With Everbridge, with their tool, they were able to also incorporate some of what we felt was lacking. And so I think that's also pretty big when you're evaluating this, the relationship that you going to have with the vendor, how receptive are they to requests from the customers itself. And I think those also played a role.

Tegus Client

That's helpful. Talking about kind of like the sales process a little bit. Two questions on this is that, can you talk about like what like the average annual spend is on a product like a Dataminr, like assuming this is like an enterprise solution is not one particular use. I want to understand what the average spend is and kind of how I want to compare it to like what does this mean for a large organization like a Google or an Uber?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. My previous company was an early adopter of Dataminr, so they got a good rate when they brought them on initially. But there was an understanding that, at the end of the contract term, that the amount would balloon and it ended up being something 3x to 4x more than what some of the other solutions were offering as their bid rate.

And again, I think a part of that is because these other solutions are sort of newer. I think Everbridge, they went from being a mass communication company and they're sort of delving into the first alerting. So it makes sense that they would come in with lower bids, and who knows what that looks like down the road?

But yes, Dataminr is a high cost solution as compared to the other vendors. I won't pretend to know the exact figure, but I understand that it's in the high tens of thousands. And of course, that will depend on how many licenses you get per users. I'm sure that number can grow as well.

Tegus Client

Got it. When you said the cost went up at 4x, so the new pricing is 4x compared to the early adoption. Was that Dataminr's price would kind of have gone up 4x what the initial contract terms were? Or was Dataminr's pricing 4x compared to other vendors out in the space?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

No, my understanding was Dataminr was 4x to what the other vendors were offering. And I also understood it ballooned, but I don't know to what extent.

Tegus Client

Got it. And I completely appreciate you may not know exact figures, but is this like a \$100,000, \$200,000 a year kind of spend? Or is this like a \$1 million plus?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

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Yes, I don't believe it's \$1 million plus, but that could change if you have sort of a ton of licenses for Dataminr. The way I understand it is it's per license. So there's a limited amount of users who can actually be on the tool.

And for a company, say, as big as Google where you're going to have multiple users, different areas focusing on different things. I'm sure that amount is multiplied. So if it was in, say, the hundreds to thousands and you sort of multiply that out, I don't know if you can get there.

Tegus Client

That's helpful. Essentially, what I'm trying to kind of get to is that \$100,000, \$200,000, \$300,000 seems like a pretty expensive license. But to an organization like Uber or like in a Google, in the grand scheme of things, it's not that expensive.

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. I mean, again, it depends also on how robust the security programs are, which would be if the cost centers that bear the brand, not necessarily the parent company or what have you.

Tegus Client

That's fair. I guess the second part of this question is, like you had mentioned, many vendors are pitching you guys on using their product. What would cause you to switch from, say, Dataminr to somebody else? Or is that the solution is just so robust that there's very low chance of switching regardless of price increases?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. I mean, I think, you would sort of turn it on its head, the security executives or they would sort of challenge you to justify the expense and they will challenge you to find other vendors and see if they can meet what Dataminr is doing for that lower cost.

So at least at my previous company, it was sort of a constant sort of pressure to see if Dataminr is still performing to a level that's way above these competitors. Otherwise, let's see what's out there and let's challenge them to sort of meet the demand. So it definitely would be cost, but it would also be whether they meet the demands that Dataminr has been able to set.

Tegus Client

Yes. It seems like this product has just become so robust that it's become such an integral part of GSOCs and other teams that it seems like pricing has kind of become inelastic, so to speak.

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. I mean, to a degree, I mean, you have smaller companies that just aren't going to be able to afford it.

Tegus Client

Right.

Regional Security Specialist at Google

But yes, certainly. At a certain level, yes, I believe that is the case.

Tegus Client

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That's helpful. Are you able to comment on your customer service experience with them? Like how is it? Are they accessible? I just want to understand how your experience has been.

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. They've been super receptive. If we're talking about Dataminr, they've been super receptive. They would be totally okay with sending people that meet us down in our office, they'd fly people out from New York, they'd fly people out from London to move with us whenever we wanted, really. And they would come on, I would say, maybe every 3 months to train up on a new feature or if they'd like us to pilot like a beta that they were running.

And then within that, we would share our feedback with certain tools. And then they would follow up on that within the next month, the next few weeks, see how their response to our feedback was being received. So from a customer service standpoint, they're readily available even by e-mail. We receive responses pretty quickly. Yes, I think there aren't any complaints with that.

Tegus Client

That's helpful. Also, I kind of wanted to ask, so are you aware that they have almost like these 800 domain experts, a team of experts that kind of help them with providing a solution? And do you engage with them?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

So when you say domain experts?

Tegus Client

I'm not sure about Factual or some of the other ones, but Dataminr has a team of 800 individuals who are like domain experts and like, say, in regions, also in industries that are located across the globe. And they kind of help provide these alerts or kind of identify these alerts and then kind of help put pieces together. Well, I was just curious like did you know there's a team like that. And if so, do you kind of engage with them?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

No. Our primary engagement was with the with our customer reps. And then with the, I guess, engineers who implemented the specific features that they were showcasing.

Tegus Client

Got it.

Regional Security Specialist at Google

But yes, not with any sort of analytical experts, no.

Tegus Client

That's helpful. And on to the point you just brought up, engineers, integration. Can you talk about how integrated this solution is at, like just, say, Google and then like at your previous company? And then if you wanted to kind of rip it out tomorrow, how easy or hard would that be?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

Yes. So I would say it depends on what level of integration you're looking for. I think the sort of best way to

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use Dataminr is the Gmail alerting. And with e-mail and Gmail in particular, you are able to set different sort of filtering to be able to get just the results that you're looking for or to categorize it in a certain way. I know with the integration of WatchKeeper, they were allowed to use their API on the map, where you could then download the sort of KML files and then see where each alert was and sort of see the relative positions of your own assets. In that sense, it's sort of a customized view of Dataminr with its relative impact to the company's assets. Maybe if that's what you're interested in, they can definitely do that as well.

Tegus Client

Yes, well, like the classic example I kind of use with this is like think about Microsoft Office in any like the company or business. Like it's so heavily reliant, if you take this out, it will be hard to take out tomorrow and cause disruption to the work you're doing. Is it to that level? Or is it just like, I took out Dataminr tomorrow and I put Factal, and you may see some disruption, but you're not going to miss a beat?

Regional Security Specialist at Google

I mean, I think it depends on your expectations for the product, right? Because Factal provides a solution that is sort of what it is out of the box. It's the same editors posting stories that they feel may be relevant to most people. There isn't any sort of customization that you would get from, say, Dataminr. It isn't going to have a relation to your assets.

I think they do have a future where you can sort of post what cities you're interested in, and then they would highlight the events in those cities. But it's not to a level where you're going to get exact distance, coordinates or relative impact if you're looking for something very specific, like work closures or protests, I don't think you would get that.

I think their classifications are pretty wide, not as tailored to the business. But if that really isn't important, and you just want to see the news of the day, and that's enough, then for some people, Factal would be the better solution just because of the cost. And they may feel like all of the other things that Dataminr provides are bells and whistles. So it would just depend on the customer, I believe.

Tegus Client

Understood. This was a very helpful call. Thank you.

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