



When Border Control Meets Big Data Technology

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Border control has always been a critical issue, but the urgency is far more widely apparent since the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. Zettafox, a privately owned consultancy, is working on a system that will employ big data analytics to help border security agents assess the risk factor of travellers and hopefully prevent disaster.

Zettafox's work focuses on extending the predictive to the prescriptive. That is, they're working algorithms that will move beyond saying what might happen, to suggesting what should be done.

Patrick Zerbib and Marc Atallah, founders of Zettafox, have been working in late 2013 and early 2014 on simulations to, according to Atallah, decisively demonstrate to an unnamed European border agency a "smarter approach to raising the red flag."

Their approach allows potential risk profiles to be calculated from "overwhelming big data," said Zerbib, drawn from the vast amounts of available personal information, such as financial transactions (think credit card records), social media presence, mobile communication history, and more. Mining this data allows the system to spot high-risk profiles.

Once flagged, a suspect can be held for questioning and an investigation can be opened.

“Human trafficking, the abusive movement of people across borders for exploitation, could be better detected by use of the data,” Atallah said.

Zettafox is already seeing interest from multiple actors, including banks, border control agencies, airlines, port authorities, and more. The consultancy will soon seek investment of several million euros, said Zerbib. The cash inflow will allow the company to keep up with a high-growth market, speed up development, and expand into new markets.

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