# DataTribe Challenge Finalist Q&A: Sai Venkataraman, Co-Founder and CEO; and Santhosh Purathepparambil, Co-Founder, at SecurityAdvisor



DataTribe recently closed submissions to its second annual DataTribe Challenge, a global competition to identify and develop high-technology startups with a vision to disrupt cybersecurity and data science.

Three finalists were announced, who will split $20,000 in prize money, and the winner will be eligible to receive up to $2 million in seed capital from DataTribe. The investment could also potentially include a follow-on investment up to $6.5 million in Series A venture funding from DataTribe and AllegisCyber, a Silicon Valley-based cybersecurity venture capital firm.

In a new Q&A blog series, we are interviewing all three of the finalists to highlight their innovative business models, how they are disrupting their respective industries, and why they chose to participate in the DataTribe Challenge.

For this installment, we spoke with Sai Venkataraman, Co-Founder and CEO, and Santhosh Purathepparambil, Co-Founder at SecurityAdvisor, an enterprise-grade application that teaches employees cyber hygiene through teachable moments and thereby fortifying an organization's most vulnerable attack surface with a resilient cyber culture.

**Q: Tell us about your backgrounds.**

**Sai**: I grew up in management consulting in Bain & Company, where I worked in its Tech, Media and Telecom practice across geographies with projects around cybersecurity, IoT, mobility and related services. From Bain, I joined Intel Security as a Director of Strategy. That's where I met my co-founders Santhosh and Rohan. After a brief stint in the strategy team, I transitioned to product management for data security. I focused on building a

product that protects data across endpoint, cloud and network, wherever data went, especially as perimeters dissolved in enterprises.

Then I joined Fortscale out of Israel where I was a VP responsible for all go-to-market initiatives and business development. After they were acquired by RSA, I joined forces with Santhosh to create SecurityAdvisor.

**Santhosh**: My background is primarily in cybersecurity. Before we formed this company, I worked as a senior director of engineering in McAfee, leading its core cybersecurity platforms called ePolicy Orchestrator, where I worked with many enterprise customers and managed millions of endpoint nodes. Prior to McAfee, I worked for a startup called myCIO.com, where we built a cloud-based solution in 2000. myCIO.com merged with McAfee, which is how I joined McAfee.

**Sai**: Our third co-founder, Rohan Puri, was responsible for engineering the cloud management platform at McAfee, and is also now at SecurityAdvisor responsible for all engineering.

**Q**: **Tell us about your business/idea.**

**Sai**: When we were previously working together, the three of us would meet and discuss how there were way too many security incidents. Each of our products would produce hundreds of thousands of alerts. It's impossible for most enterprises, and definitely impossible for mid-market companies, to handle so many alerts.

The second thing we noticed was that most of these incidents were caused by human action. It's the human who falls victim to phishing, it's the human who clicks on different links, and the human who shares the data. That got us thinking, what can the CISO do to reduce the number of incidents, and be more secure?

At that point in time, the only choice CISOs had was training, and users hate training. We wanted to come up with something that was more intelligent, that could deliver personalized tips, and be an advisor to the human – a Siri for cybersecurity. That's where the idea for SecurityAdvisor came about.

We are all about providing micro-messages to users that are relevant to help them to avoid common cybersecurity errors.

**Q: What was the original inspiration for your company/product?**

**Santhosh**: We looked at this problem we faced in our own work life. We used to take training modules, and found that we never really paid attention. Then we looked at the

market and we could clearly see 90 percent of the money corporations were spending was on protection technologies only. Even though the stats very clearly show that people cause more than 60 percent of incidents. The appropriate money was not being spent to secure those incidents, and there was no innovations along that line.  From that, we got the idea of a solution to build on it.

**Sai:** In business, there are technology, processes and people -- and the people part of the equation is no longer working.  We aim to help people become immune to cyber attacks, and build a new category focused on cyber hygiene.


**Q: What's your vision for future ... "What will the market you are pursuing look like in 5-10 years?"**

**Sai**: As I mentioned, the people side of cybersecurity is very underserved, and we see this becoming a much larger category. The emerging cyber hygiene category has the potential to become a multibillion-dollar category.

It will ultimately become even more imperative for organizations and enterprises to engage with their employees and give them meaningful tips that will help them stay secure. It will become a more pervasive, employee engagement-focused market.

If you can teach people to have good oral hygiene as an example, this will positively influence their overall health. With this analogy in mind, we aim to teach employees to have good cyber hygiene, which will enhance the overall security health for any organization.

Outcomes measurement will also become a big part of our efforts, where every engagement with employees is measured in terms of ROI. In addition, CISOs will be able to measure their security risk, and show improvement over a period of time.

**Santhosh**: We look at it as an immersive experience, but not disruptive, for the employee. It does not disturb what employees do, and it's relevant and appropriate. When you have someone proactively helping, and coaching employees to develop the right set of habits for a positive cybersecurity hygiene, then corporations will get better security too.


**Q**: **How does your business address pressing cyber and data challenges for the commercial sector?**

**Sai**: There are three major threats in the cyber arena today. The first part is loss of control, where data is everywhere. Second, there are way too many security incidents. Third, there aren't enough trained employees available to tackle all these challenges. We help with all of these challenges that CISOs face today.

We can reduce the number of security incidents by directly engaging with employees. As data goes everywhere, ultimately, an important control point is the actual user. By engaging with users, we can control the flow of data and mitigate risks from data leaking outside the organization. In addition, by reducing the number of incidents, the number of employees that you need to investigate and address these challenges become fewer too.

**Santhosh**: The commercial sector is going through a digital transformation. With that comes a lot of challenges in terms of adopting the technology, and empowering the people for maximum productivity. With more and more digital tools, such as cloud apps and self-service tools, corporations and employees need to be able to safely uses these innovations.

**Q**: **What attracted you to the DataTribe Foundry and why did you choose to participate in the DataTribe challenge?**

**Sai**: Someone we trusted initially referred us to DataTribe. Once we applied for the challenge, we loved it. The DataTribe team is highly responsive, and has already taught us some very valuable things, and helped us to brainstorm new ideas for the business.

**Santhosh**: When we seek out guidance, we look for the quality of the people, because we know this is not a short-term relationship. We're looking for a long-term relationship. We have big ambitions for our company, and DataTribe in on the same frequency as us in terms of helping us to achieve our potential. Also, DataTribe has the most talented people in the industry.

**Q**: **What's your long-term vision for your business?**

**Sai**: Essentially to be a category creator. We want to create a new category for cyber hygiene and we want to be a market leader in it and deliver results in that space. The most important result would be delivering security outcomes for our customers. Can we reduce malware threats by 99 percent? Can we reduce data leakage incidents by greater than 90 percent? Our current customers are already seeing these types of results. And

**Santhosh**: We want to provide an invisible and ubiquitous solution that helps any organization to advance their security hygiene through their employees and people.

*We would like to thank Sai and Santhosh for speaking with us. Don't miss out on the opportunity to see the three finalists present and answer questions from judges on November 14th at City Garage, Baltimore MD. Click here to request an invitation to this event.*