

# Here's What Really Goes On Inside Palantir, The Secretive Data-Analysis Company Used By The NSA And FBI

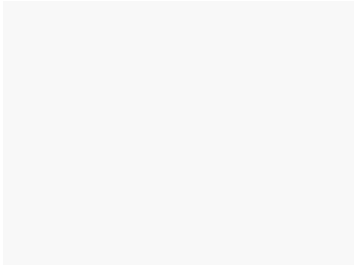
Rob Price Jan 12, 2015, 4:59 PM



Leaked [documents obtained by TechCrunch](#) have shed new light on Palantir, a secretive data analysis company whose tools are used more than a dozen US government agencies, including the NSA and the FBI.

In late 2013, Palantir [raised money at a \\$9 billion valuation](#) — but despite this, very little information about the company is publicly available.

The company's website alludes to "augmenting human intelligences" and says the company has produced the "world's best experience for working with data." Thanks to a private document produced at the time of the 2013 funding round seen by TechCrunch, we now know what that means in real terms.



Palantir cofounder Peter Thiel was also a cofounder of PayPal. Tristan Fewings/Stringer/Getty Images

Palantir provides data-analysis solutions for its customers, focusing in three areas: government, finance, and legal research. The company offers customers advanced search tools that allow them to make sense of vast quantities of complex data without requiring any coding expertise.

Previously, a government agency would have had to hire specialist engineers to analyze the data Palantir is designed for. Thanks to the tools offered by Palantir, anyone can dig in to petabytes of data using natural language queries.

Peter Thiel, a cofounder of PayPal, is also a Palantir cofounder. Four members on Palantir's five-person management team previously worked at PayPal — and the company says it has drawn upon this wealth of knowledge for its fraud-detection algorithms.

There are also several success stories included — most notably, that Palantir was instrumental in bringing down disgraced banker Bernie Madoff. "A firm hired by the Securities Investment Protection Corporation used Palantir's software to sort through the mountains of data, over 40 years of records, to convict Ponzi schemer Bernie Madoff," [TechCrunch reports](#). The software is so advanced that it was able "to construct a story around key events ... in just a couple of hours."

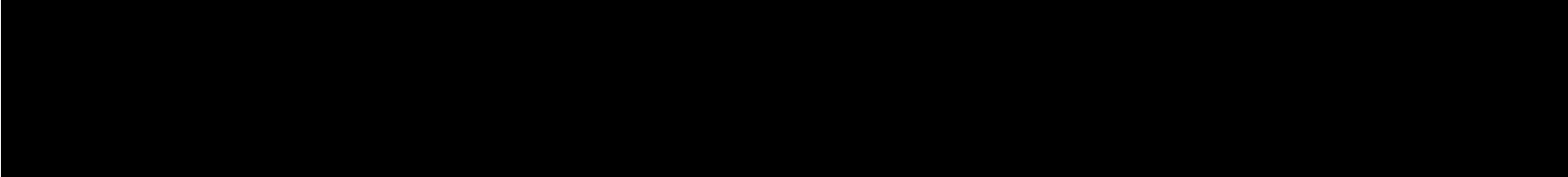
Here's [another example](#) of how it is used:

The Pentagon used the software to track patterns in roadside bomb deployment and was able to conclude that garage-door openers were being used as remote detonators. With Palantir, the Marines are now able to upload DNA samples from remote locations and tap into information gathered from years of collecting fingerprints and DNA evidence. The results are returned almost immediately. Without Palantir, the suspects would have already moved onto a different location by the time the field agents received the results.

We've previously known that the company's software was licensed by government bodies — [including the NSA, the FBI, and the CIA](#) — but we now know who else pays for Palantir's services. There are more than a dozen US government clients, including the Marine Corps, the Air Force, Special Operations Command, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the LAPD.

Palantir has been praised by its customers. One LAPD officer says it has "brought great success" and "supports the cops on the streets and the officers doing investigations." A Marine who now works for a military contractor said Palantir was "the combination of every analytical tool you could ever dream of. You will know every single bad guy in your area." And 96% of Palantir users with the US Army in Afghanistan also reportedly said they preferred it to the Army's in-house data-analysis tools.

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