



# Brand republic

**In Europe the name Gatso is as synonymous with speed cameras as Hoover is with vacuum cleaners. KEVIN BORRAS met up with TIMO GATSONIDES, grandson of Gatsometer's founder, as the CEO brings his Dutch firm to the US ahead of its 50th anniversary in 2008**

A few years ago the British satirical magazine *Private Eye* ran an article about 'mobile offices'. The journalist, somewhat lazily, consistently referred to them throughout the piece as 'Portakabins' - the brand name of the most famous manufacturer of mobile offices. Amazingly, despite what amounted to thousands of pounds worth of free advertising, Portakabin's CEO wrote a letter of complaint to the editor of *Private Eye*.

It wouldn't be too far-fetched to imagine that if this had been an article about speed cameras and the journalist had referred to them as Gatsos, Timo Gatsonides, the CEO of Gatsometer, would be rubbing his hands with glee and not rifling through his desk drawers to find his fountain pen.

Gatsometer, which celebrates its half-century next year, are based in Haarlem on the outskirts of Amsterdam and until very recently have been primarily focused on, in *Thinking Highways* terms, Europe and the Rest of

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“Put simply – stability and credibility. You have to keep in mind that while the US growth is rapid, it's also happening within a vacuum. As you know, there are rigorous standards for photo-enforcement technologies being used outside of the US, but none exist within the US.”

“Growth in the US market has often been based on a company's ability to sell rather than a company's ability to

the World and reticent about attempting to 'break' the North American market. However, a very brief Google search will tell you that GATSO USA is no longer a pair of words that generates a question that begins “Did you mean to search for....?” A clearly enthused Gatsonides takes up the story.

“This is big for us! Until this year, we'd spent decades basing our operation for the development and supply of photo-enforcement technology from our headquarters in the Netherlands, expanding our business throughout the world by working alongside third-party distributors, agents and partners. That's not changed but in the US we felt the time had come to move up a gear.

“Our own facility, our own efforts, our own staff and our own technology – but more than that, we're not only supplying the technology, but running the entire enforcement program, too.”

This entails working closely with cities to provide an end-to-end solution, from installing the cameras and running the program to issuing the citations and educating the public about the success of the program. In other words, from violation to citation.

“We incorporated the company at the end of the summer and have based ourselves in Massachusetts. We have also opened two outpost offices in Arizona and Illinois. We're very excited about our new company.”

### Timing is... everything

The obvious question is “Why now?” Why wait for your 49th year of operation before, metaphorically at least, setting sail for America.

“There is a prolific growth of red-light-camera programs being seen throughout the US right now. Although the US market is still in its infancy when compared to the mature programs working around the world, the growth per month is far outpacing all other markets and this wasn't happening until this last year. Now is the time. For over 12 years, we'd been supplying our technology to the US market through one of our third-party partners, but with the prolific growth we've been seeing, especially in smaller cities of less than 60,000 people, we felt it was time to provide the US market with something more than just another camera system.”

Time for another obvious question, then. What are you providing the US with that it's never had before?

provide court-proven, credible solutions. With virtually no government recognition, either on a state or federal level; the competitive field in the US has grown from two or three companies to six or seven. Competition is always healthy, but when you're working in law enforcement technology, we think high standards in accuracy

and chain of evidence should come first. We believe that the very strengths and successes that have driven our company forward over these many years will be valuable commodities at this exciting time.”

So, given this already tough, competitive landscape what makes Gatsonides think his company can make a significant mark?

“We’ve met the challenges of international standards and we’re using those same techniques, products and experience in the US. We’re coming into a very special time for Gatsometer. Next year is going to be our 50th anniversary in this business and whatever line of business you’re in, to be doing it successfully for that long shows that you’ve been treating your clients with a long term commitment to improvement and not a short term commitment to make the next month’s accounting sheet look good.

“By using the very same technical solutions in the US that we’ve passed approvals with in Europe, we’re bringing violation certainty and by combining that with 49 years of best practice experience, we’re bringing credibility. I can’t think of any city in the US, or anywhere else in the world for that matter that would want anything less.”

The Dutch are known for being the tallest Caucasian nation on earth (the average Dutchman is nearly an inch taller than the average Brit) and having worked with many a Netherlands native over the last decade and a bit, they are also, almost by default, a naturally confident people. Gatsonides is over 6ft tall and certainly is not lacking in confidence either.

“I am confident, yes. When you look at three main indicators; growth market, established company and strong technology credentials; I think we have a great story to tell. We’re certainly changing the way we do business in the US, but our company mantra remains the same – chain of evidence and established credibility.”

**Snapshot**

So what else is new in Gatsometer’s world? As if a new, US company wasn’t enough to occupy the firm’s time, they are also hugely happy with their new product: the GS11 camera.

“The GS11 will be the camera that we’ll be carrying across to all of our product sectors – red light enforcement, fixed speed and mobile speed. The GS11 is more than a camera though - it’s an imaging engine.”

I think I must have recoiled (albeit unintentionally) as Gatsonides is quick to defend his new-found phrase (that same day I had been for a consultation with my eye surgeon and had heard, for the first time, my eyes described as ‘individually functioning vision systems’).

“No, really, it is. I know that it sounds corny perhaps, but with so much research and development effort driven into the simple process of capturing the clearest of images in the widest spectrum of weather or light and then encrypting those images at the time of the violation; we believe the descriptive title is warranted. We’ve



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kept the ‘camera never lies ethos in the world of photo-enforcement. Well, as far as Gatsometer products go, anyway.”

Although the GS11 was not developed primarily for the company’s US push, the ebullient Gatsonides is certain that it will go some way to enhancing the firm’s new, TransAtlantic efforts.

“With so much new focus on new red-light photo programs, the GS11 is going to provide the kind of images that cities will insist on. Listen, I spoke earlier about the lack of technical approvals or standard in the US, but sometimes the drive for better technology comes from the customers and not the regulatory bodies. As cities see programs becoming mainstream, they’ll want to see technology and especially images, in step. But it’s not just images; it’s the driving factors behind those images; such as accuracy of vehicle

detection, the certifiable measurement of true speed and the manner and time in which the images are encrypted. It sounds boring to some perhaps but the chain of evidence must sometimes be proven in court and it’s these attributes that make the difference in the eyes of a judge, the press and the public. We’ve seen it around the world time and time again, with a growth in new programs being adopted by cities; there almost inevitably lies a growth in contested tickets. As a city, you’d better be sure you’re betting on the right horse when you make those choices.

“We’re looking forward to celebrating that, not just with champagne, but with early successes for GATSO USA and of course, some exciting new product launches from Gatsometer in Europe. Being 50 isn’t a time to stand still and I can’t wait to see where we’ll be at the end of another 50 years.” **TH**