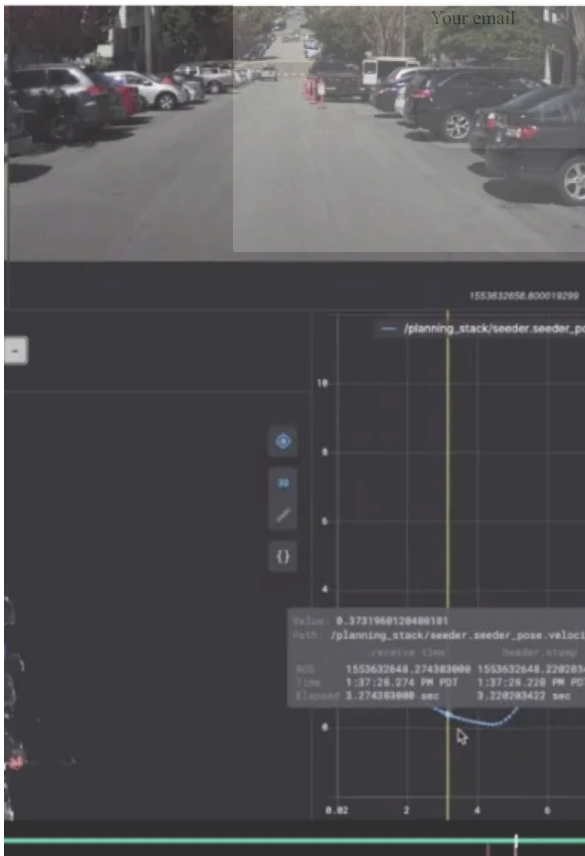


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Cruise is sharing its data visualization tool with robotics geeks everywhere

Kirsten Korosec 11:28 AM PDT · June 18, 2019



Cruise is sharing a software platform with roboticists that was initially created to give its own engineers a better understanding of the petabytes of data generated every month from its fleet of autonomous vehicles.

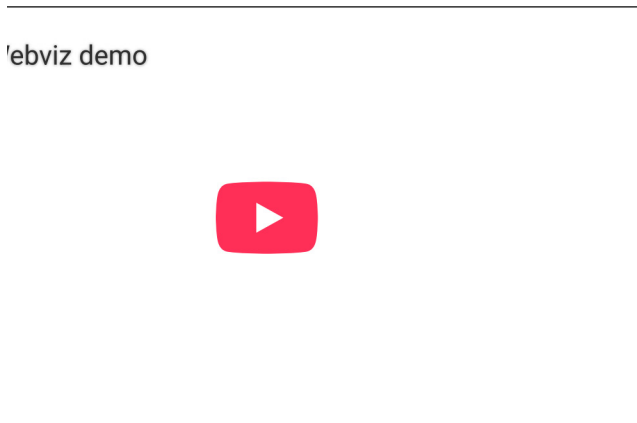
The platform is a data visualization tool called Webviz, a web-based application aimed at anyone working in robotics, a field that includes autonomous vehicles. Researchers, students and engineers can now access the tool and get visual insight into their data by dragging their robotics data into an [ROS bag file](#).

Robots and, specifically autonomous vehicles, capture loads of data from various sensors, like lidar, radar and cameras. The tool is supposed to make it easier to take that data and turn it from binary code into something visual. The tool lets users configure different layouts of panels, each one displaying information like text logs, 2D charts and 3D depictions of the AV's environment.

The tool is a product of a Cruise hackathon that was held a couple of years ago. It was apparently such a hit that engineers at the self-driving car company now use it daily to calibrate lidar sensors, verify machine learning models and debug test rides. Webviz now has 1,000 monthly active users within the company, according to Cruise.

As engineers developed Webviz, they found it could have applications outside of Cruise. The company decided to open-source it as general robotics data inspection tool. For this initial release, Cruise settled on a suite of general panels that any robotics developer can leverage to explore their own data with minimal setup, the [company said in a Medium post](#) Tuesday.

A demo video provided by Cruise is posted below.



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Prior to Webviz, Cruise engineers who wanted to turn binary AV data into something more visual would have to access a suite of tools within the ROS open-source community. While the system worked well, setting up the platform and then replicating it on a co-worker’s machine was time-consuming. It also required manually positioning windows running separate tools, such as logging message or viewing camera images.

The tool created out of the hackathon essentially helped lower the barrier to entry for engineers to explore and understand its autonomous vehicle data.

Cruise shared a piece, or an application, of Webviz earlier this year, called Worldview — a library that can turn data into 3D scenes. Cruise has also developed and open-sourced rosbag.js, a JavaScript library for reading ROS bag files. Both of these projects were developed as engineers created and built out Webviz, according to Cruise.

Cruise isn’t the only robotics-focused company (or autonomous vehicle company for that matter) to open-source data sets or other tools. For instance, Aptiv released last year nuScenes, a large-scale data set from an autonomous vehicle sensor suite.

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And it likely won’t be the last. Not only are moves like this part of the engineering culture, there are other benefits as well, including recruitment. Plus, by releasing it into the world, it’s likely that other outsiders will build upon the tool and improve it, or use it to make engineering breakthroughs in robotics.

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