



RSAC Cybersecurity Insights & Futures, Volume 5

Five RSAC™ Innovation Sandbox Case Studies
Showcase The Competition's Predictive Power

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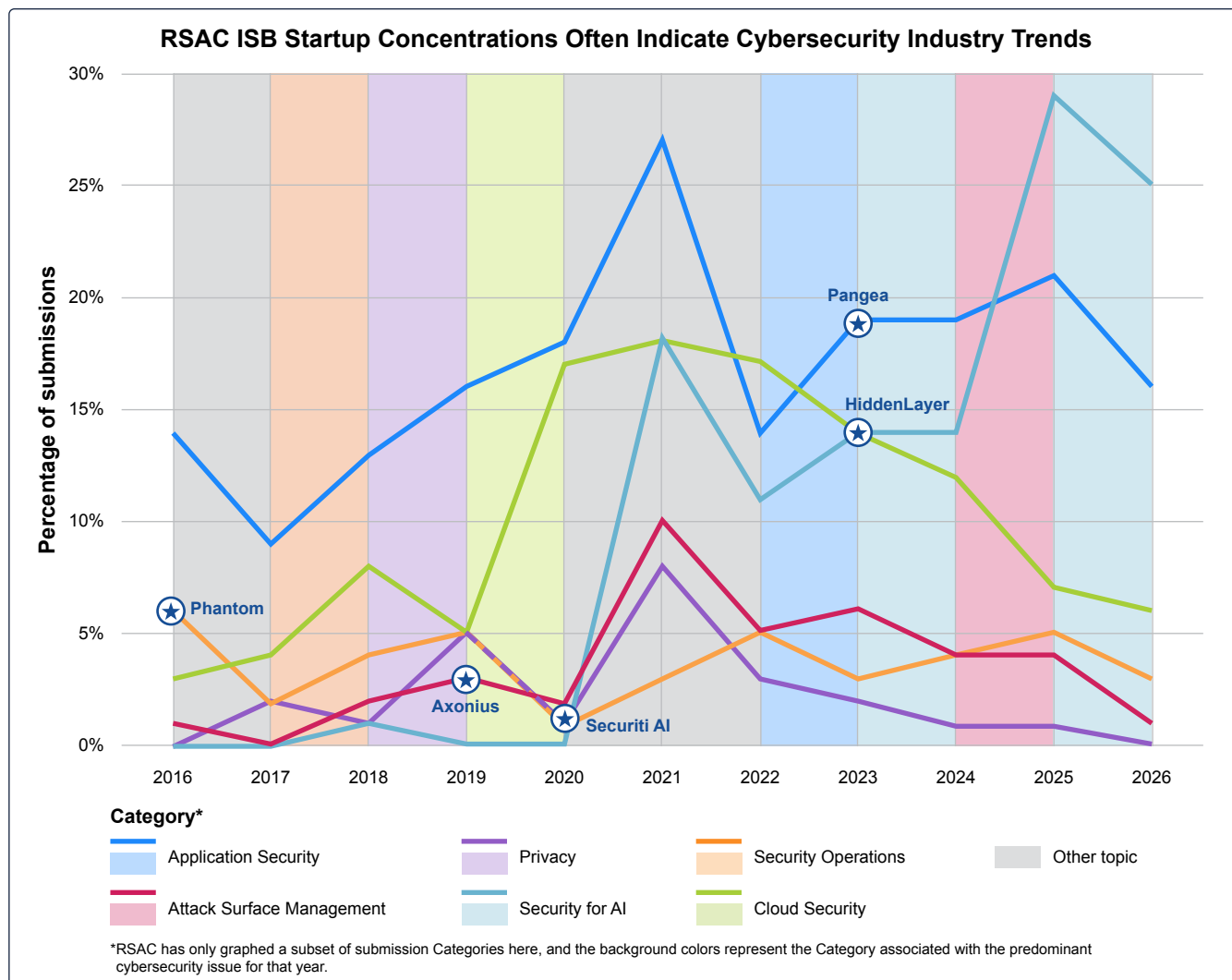
For 21 years, the RSAC Innovation Sandbox (ISB) startup competition has helped RSAC serve as a window into the industry's future. Highlights of this fifth edition of RSAC™ Cybersecurity Insights & Futures include:

- Predictive correlations between startup activity and the direction of the industry
- RSAC 2025 ISB's spike in "Security for AI" startups argues for CISOs to invest more
- How winning RSAC 2019 ISB secured one startup a Fortune 500 customer
- How one CEO handled a funding offer contingent on **not** taking the stage at RSAC 2023 ISB
- RSAC 2026 ISB's bumper crop of Agentic AI Security startups reinforces its priority

RSAC Innovation Sandbox Startups Foreshadow the Cybersecurity Industry's Trajectory

For the past 21 years, the RSAC Innovation Sandbox (ISB) contest has provided innovative cybersecurity startups with a platform to demonstrate credibility to prospective customers, establish relationships with investors, and launch their companies. When RSAC analyzes the movement of different solution Categories through Innovation Sandbox entries for 2016-2026, we see concentrations of startups that provide a strong leading edge signal of where the cybersecurity industry is going (See Figure 1).¹ For example, for RSAC 2016 ISB, the judges selected Security Operations (SecOps) startup Phantom (featured here as a case study) as that year's Winner. In 2017, cybersecurity pros battled WannaCry and NotPetya, which brought SecOps topics like detection and response to the top of that year's topic list for the cybersecurity community.² Further, the percentage of RSAC ISB startups focused on Cloud Security ticked up in 2018—and 2019 proved the year of cloud security, with cloud migrations accelerating and the Capital One cloud data breach. Similarly, RSAC saw a spike in Application Security (AppSec) startups for RSAC 2021 ISB, and AppSec tied with cyber warfare for the most prominent cybersecurity issue of 2022.³ And the list goes on!

Of course, this is correlation, not causation—the 2018 burst of cloud security entries to Innovation Sandbox didn't cause the Capital One breach—but forward-looking correlation is also valuable to CISOs trying to decide where to invest their resources. Hence, if you're still thinking about allocating budget for 2026, "Security for AI," which claimed the largest share of RSAC 2025 ISB submissions, is an excellent place to start.



Five RSAC Innovation Sandbox Case Studies Show Its Impact

For this report, we've assembled detailed case studies of five of the Top 10 Finalists from the 2016-2026 editions of the RSAC ISB competition, summarizing the startups' trajectories before and after their star turns on the RSAC Innovation Sandbox stage. And these five startups aren't outliers. Since the start of the contest, Top 10 Finalists have collectively produced more than 100 acquisitions and more than \$50.1B in investments.⁴ In 2025 alone, six Top 10 Finalists from prior years raised new capital, and nine had successful exits. Here's one illustration of the compounding impact of Innovation Sandbox on the cybersecurity industry: one of the 2025 acquisitions was F5's purchase of Calypso AI, an RSAC 2025 ISB Top 10 Finalist. F5's current CEO Kunal Anand was previously the Founder & CEO of RSAC 2016 Innovation Sandbox Top 10 Finalist Prevoty, which was itself acquired by RSAC 2006 ISB Winner Imperva in 2018.



Rehan Jalil

Co-Founder and CEO

- **Founded:** 2018
- **Solution type presented at RSAC ISB:** AI-powered PrivacyOps and data protection⁵
- **RSAC ISB History:** Winner, 2020

“When we won Innovation Sandbox, we instantly got awareness and brand recognition; it put us on the map for prospective customers.”

Company Trajectory⁶

	Immediately Pre-RSAC ISB: Feb 2020	One Year after RSAC ISB: Feb 2021	Where Are They Now: March 2026
Funding (total to column date)	\$81M	\$81M	\$156M total raised prior to acquisition
Investors (alphabetical) ⁷	General Catalyst, Mayfield, several individual investors	Same as previous	Blue Owl Capital, Capital One Ventures, Cisco Investments, Citi Ventures, Workday Ventures
Status	Private, independent (RSAC ISB requirement)	Private, independent	Acquired by Veeam, Dec 2025, for \$1.725B

“Whether you’ve raised money before or not, being in the Top 10 at Innovation Sandbox is a very strong positive signal for VCs; they came to us to express interest in participating in our next stage.”

To hear more about Securiti AI's journey from RSAC 2020 Innovation Sandbox Winner to billion-dollar-plus-exit, watch [this interview](#) with Rehan Jalil.



Oliver Friedrichs

*Founder & CEO of
Phantom and Pangea*

- **Founded:** 2014
- **Solution type presented at RSAC ISB:** Security automation and orchestration platform⁸
- **RSAC ISB History:** Winner, 2016

“At Phantom, winning Innovation Sandbox helped us do two things: 1) prove to customers that we had something truly innovative, not just an incremental improvement on an existing product; and 2) establish relationships with investors that made raising money easier.”

Company Trajectory⁹

	Immediately Pre-RSAC ISB: Feb 2016	One Year after RSAC ISB: Feb 2017	Where Are They Now: March 2026
Funding (total to column date)	\$9.2M	\$22.7M	\$22.7M total raised prior to acquisition
Investors (alphabetical) ¹⁰	Blackstone, Foundation Capital, In-Q-Tel, Rein Capital, TechOperators, several individual investors	Kleiner Perkins	Same as previous
Status	Private, independent (RSAC ISB requirement)	Private, independent	Acquired by Splunk, ¹¹ April 2018, for \$350M



- **Founded:** 2021
- **Solution type presented at RSAC ISB:** Security platform-as-a-service¹²
- **RSAC ISB History:** Top 10 Finalist, 2023

Company Trajectory¹³

	Immediately Pre-RSAC ISB: April 2023	One Year after RSAC ISB: April 2024	Where Are They Now: March 2026
Funding (total to column date)	\$51M	\$51M	\$51M total raised prior to acquisition
Investors (alphabetical) ¹⁴	Ballistic Ventures, Decibel, GV, Okta Ventures, Scale Asia Ventures (SAV), SYN Ventures, several individual investors ¹⁵	Same as previous	Same as previous
Status	Private, independent (RSAC ISB requirement)	Private, independent	Acquired by CrowdStrike, Sept 2025, for \$260M

“We entered the contest with Pangea because we knew that it would be the best way to launch our company and differentiate ourselves from the 5,000 other security vendors out there.”

To hear more about Oliver Friedrichs’ journeys with Phantom and Pangea from the Innovation Sandbox Stage at RSAC™ Conference to two successful exits, watch [this interview](#).



Dean Sysman

*Co-Founder and
Executive Chairman*

- **Founded:** 2017
- **Solution type presented at RSAC ISB:**
Cybersecurity asset management platform¹⁶
- **RSAC ISB History:** Winner, 2019

“When we worked on a major breach, my co-founders and I found the infection, but the company didn’t understand their assets; they couldn’t figure out who owned the device or how to access it. We realized many companies had the same problem, and that’s why we started Axonius.”

“As a small startup, winning Innovation Sandbox gave us market validation, which helped enterprise customers trust us.”

Dean had intended to take the stage at Innovation Sandbox himself, but his flight was delayed. Axonius’ CMO stepped in, memorably declaring that by solving the unsexy but important problem of asset management, Axonius aspired to be the “Toyota Camry of cybersecurity.”

To hear more about Axonius’ journey from RSAC 2019 Innovation Sandbox Winner to cybersecurity unicorn, watch [this interview](#) with Dean Sysman.

Company Trajectory¹⁷

	Immediately Pre-RSAC ISB: March 2019	One Year after RSAC ISB: March 2020 ¹⁸	Where Are They Now: March 2026
Funding (total to column date)	\$17M	\$95M	\$595M
Investors (alphabetical) ¹⁹	Bessemer Venture Partners, Emerge Ventures, Vertex Ventures, Western Technology Investment, YL Ventures	Lightspeed Venture Partners, OpenView	Accel, Alkeon Capital, Alta Park Capital, Blue Owl Capital, DTCP, Harmony Partners, ICONIQ Growth, Silver Lake Waterman, Stripes
Status	Private, independent (RSAC ISB requirement)	Private, independent	Private, independent



What’s next?

“We realized this problem is so big and so deep that we have the potential to become a public independent company.”



**Christopher "Tito"
Sestito**

*Chairman of the Board,
CEO & Co-Founder*

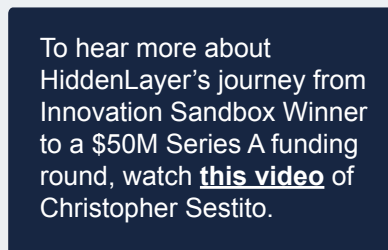
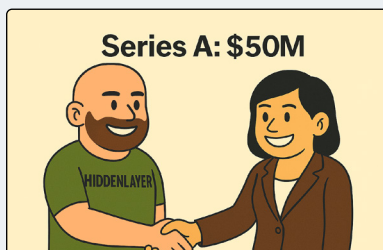
- **Founded:** 2022
- **Solution type presented at RSAC ISB:**
AI Application Security²¹
- **RSAC ISB History:** Winner, 2023

"HiddenLayer winning RSAC ISB in 2023 gave CISOs permission to care about AI Security, and it generated lots of inbound customer interest, which meant we could plow \$0.90 of every \$1 into R&D!"

"In our four years as a company, winning Innovation Sandbox got us the most attention; all the new investors that came aboard for our Series A came to us because of RSAC ISB."

Company Trajectory²²

	Immediately Pre-RSAC ISB: April 2023	One Year after RSAC ISB: April 2024	Where Are They Now: March 2026
Funding (total to column date)	\$6M	\$56M	\$56M
Investors (alphabetical) ²³	Capital Factory, Knollwood Investment Advisory, Secure Octane, StepStone, Ten Eleven Ventures, and several individual investors	Aro Ventures, Booz Allen Ventures, Capital One Ventures, IBM Ventures, M12 - Microsoft's Venture Fund, Moore Strategic Ventures	Same as previous
Status	Private, independent (RSAC ISB requirement)	Private, independent	Private, independent



What's next?

"We're introducing a new product at RSAC 2026, we're building a bigger go-to-market organization, and we're developing versions of our products that will work for the mid-market and AI startups."

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RSAC 2026 Innovation Sandbox Predicts That the Agentic AI Security Explosion Will Continue in 2027

The RSAC 2026 ISB contest will take place less than two weeks after the release of this report. In our analysis of the 2026 cohort of Innovation Sandbox startups, “Security for AI” and Application Security were the two most common Categories of entries. RSAC investigated further, and we discovered that 2026’s large group of Agentic AI Security startups were distributed nearly evenly across those two Categories. Hence, we continue to recommend that CISOs pencil in Agentic AI Security as a probable top priority for 2027 planning.²⁵ And if you’re attending RSAC 2026 Conference, don’t miss the chance to see the Top 10 Finalists present their companies and answer questions from Innovation Sandbox’s panel of expert judges [live](#)!

Endnotes

- 1 In our RSAC Cybersecurity Insights & Futures [Volume 4](#), we introduced a new vendor/product classification system for both ISB startups and mainstream RSAC Conference Exhibitors (which uses Category/Subcategory), which we also apply here. See Volume 4’s endnote 3 for details.
- 2 We used an LLM to analyze each calendar year of cybersecurity industry developments and distill that corpus down to the single most prominent topic.
- 3 The aftermath of December 2021’s Log4Shell vulnerability boosted the salience of application security, and cyber warfare shot to the top of the list because of the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- 4 Source: Crunchbase
- 5 RSAC is using Securi AI’s description of itself when the company entered the ISB contest. At the time of its acquisition by Veeam, Securi AI described itself as a data security posture management (DSPM), data privacy, and AI trust solution provider.
- 6 Source: Crunchbase
- 7 We list all investors in all funding rounds to the column date in the first column, and each subsequent column lists only new investors through that column’s date.
- 8 Here, we use Phantom’s description of its product when the firm entered Innovation Sandbox. Currently, this type of product/capability is more commonly referred to as “security orchestration, automation, and response” (SOAR).
- 9 Source: Crunchbase
- 10 See endnote 7 above for detail on how we list investors.
- 11 Splunk was itself acquired by Cisco Systems in March 2024.
- 12 RSAC is using Pangea’s description of its initial solution when the company entered the ISB contest. Through early 2025, this type of product/capability was more commonly described as “Composable security API.” When CrowdStrike acquired Pangea, the two companies described Pangea as helping developers build secure AI applications and agents.
- 13 Source: Crunchbase
- 14 See endnote 7 above for detail on how we list investors.
- 15 The individual investors included George Kurtz, Founder & CEO, CrowdStrike.
- 16 We’re using Axonius’ description of its product when the firm entered Innovation Sandbox. Subsequently, this type of product/capability became known as “cyber asset attack surface management” (CAASM), and today, Axonius describes its flagship product as an asset intelligence platform for security operations and exposure management.
- 17 Source: Crunchbase
- 18 To be precise, these figures are from one year and 26 days after Axonius won RSAC 2019 ISB; we wanted to include Axonius’ \$58M Series C round, which closed on March 31, 2020.
- 19 See endnote 7 above for detail on how we list investors.
- 20 Images generated with AI.
- 21 We’re using HiddenLayer’s description of its product at the time of the ISB 2023 contest. As of the Volume 4 report, RSAC instead calls this Category “Security for AI” (prior to Volume 4, we referred to it as “AI & ML Security”). See Volume 4’s endnote 3 for details on why we made that change.
- 22 Sources: Crunchbase and RSAC February 2026 interview with Christopher Sestito.
- 23 See endnote 7 above for detail on how we list investors.
- 24 Images generated with AI.
- 25 See RSAC’s recommendations in the Volume 4 report for details.

The Data That Inspired This Report

Cybersecurity is too big and complex to be solved alone. It requires a collective, global effort across all disciplines to tackle rapidly evolving threats. This is why RSAC has brought hundreds of thousands of the most diverse minds in cybersecurity together for 35 years and counting at our flagship event, [RSAC Conference](#).

RSAC’s mission is to unite the cybersecurity community to create a safer society. We do this through our [RSAC™ Membership Platform](#) and our annual Conference. RSAC Conference is the largest and most influential event in the cybersecurity industry, bringing together industry leaders, researchers, and innovators to discuss the latest advancements and challenges in cybersecurity.

RSAC Conference selects presentations through a rigorous process. Our independent Program Committee consists of 150+ cybersecurity experts from enterprise, government, academia, and the vendor community, who evaluate submissions based on relevance, originality, and impact. All content selected for the program must meet strict neutral and educational guidelines. Through our Call for Submissions process, RSAC received **nearly 3,000 proposals** from the global cybersecurity community for RSAC 2026 Conference.

Additionally, RSAC Conference has become a launchpad for groundbreaking cybersecurity startups through initiatives like the RSAC Innovation Sandbox contest, which has helped emerging companies secure funding and gain industry recognition. This environment fosters innovation, making RSAC a key destination for companies looking to showcase cutting-edge security solutions. For ISB 2026, which will be the 21st edition of the contest, RSAC received **over 150 submissions** from around the world to compete for an opportunity to be a Top 10 Finalist and ultimately one declared winner.

RSAC 2026 Conference is expecting **650 exhibiting companies**, from startups to well-established platform providers. We offer RSAC™ Early Stage Expo for up and comers in the industry; RSAC™ Next Stage for rapidly growing startups; and a sprawling Expo with innovative solution providers from across the globe.

RSAC also hosts specialized [programs](#) for cybersecurity executives at key stages in their careers such as: 1) CISO Boot Camp (CBC) for aspiring CISOs; 2) Cyber Leaders Forum (CLF) for CISOs of mid-sized enterprises; and 3) Executive Security Action Forum (ESAF) for CISOs of Fortune 1000 firms.

Why We Created This Report

This vibrant community has grown into the convening authority of the cybersecurity industry. Through reports like this, we aim to educate and empower the community to stay ahead of emerging threats—and to inspire and support one another in times of need. Everything we do is for the community and by the community, to enable collaboration and foster growth. Find more Insights & Futures reports like this one [here](#).

Who We Serve

The RSAC Community is represented by:



140+ Countries



4,500+ Contributing Experts



40,000+ Annual Conference Participants



Global 1000 Security Executives



Senior Government Decision-makers



Top Anti-fraud Executives



**Innovation Sandbox Participants
Boasting \$50.1B in Investments***

*Source: Crunchbase

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We look forward to bringing you many more reports like this one.
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