



Amazon Announces “Innovative” Automated Indoor Surveillance Drone

Amazon is now offering customers “An Innovative New Approach to Always Being at Home.” The innovation: an indoor drone!

At an event held on September 24, the tech titan announced a slate of new devices, including one that it calls “The Ring Always Home Cam.” Here’s how the company’s press release described the home-based surveillance drone:

That’s why I’m excited to announce the Ring Always Home Cam, a new way to look after the home and provide multiple viewpoints with one device. This autonomous indoor security camera flies your chosen, personalized paths so that you can easily check in on your home for peace of mind — like whether someone left a window open or forgot to turn the stove off.

The Ring Always Home Cam also easily integrates with Ring Alarm — our home security system — charting a new path forward not just for how people use security cameras, but also for the benefits of a home alarm system. When Ring Alarm is triggered while in Away Mode, the Always Home Cam will automatically fly a set path to see what’s happening. You can easily stream video while the camera is in-flight via the Ring App, making sure that you’re in the know when it comes to everything happening at home.



Ring/YouTube

Wow. Amazon has been promising drones for years, but who would have thought they’d have drones that fly around inside your house while you’re not home!

“I believe the Ring Always Home Cam will change how we think about home security and is proof of what can happen when we continue to push boundaries,” said Jamie Siminoff, the founder of the Ring surveillance company, purchased by Amazon in 2018.



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Siminoff is right: The Ring cameras have certainly changed the way we think about home security, but probably not in the way he meant.

In a letter to U.S. senators in January of this year, Amazon admitted that it had fired employees caught spying on customers using the company's Ring cameras.

The letter to legislators, signed by Amazon Vice President of Public Policy Brian Huseman, explained that Ring received four complaints of its employees viewing Ring data "that exceeded what was necessary for their job functions." Huseman reports in the letter that "after determining that the individual violated company policy, the individual was terminated."

The access to the live video feeds of Ring customers by Amazon employees was first reported by The Intercept. The authors of that story discovered that people in Ukraine hired by Ring were given access to user video for research purposes.

In its letter, Ring explained, "The R&D team in Ukraine can only access publicly available videos and videos available from Ring employees, contractors, and friends and family of employees or contractors with their express consent."

Of course, the location of people peeping on customers seems of secondary import at best.

Apparently, Ring surveillance devices aren't only vulnerable to unwanted access by Amazon employees. The following chilling account was published in December 2019 by Vice:

A blaring siren suddenly rips through the Ring camera, startling the Florida family inside their own home.

"It's your boy Chance on Nulled," a voice says from the Ring camera, which a hacker has taken over. "How you doing? How you doing?"

"Welcome to the NulledCast," the voice says.

The NulledCast is a podcast live-streamed to Discord. It's a show in which hackers take over people's Ring and Nest smart home cameras and use their speakers to talk to and harass their unsuspecting owners. In the example above, Chance blared noises and shouted racist comments at the Florida family.

"Sit back and relax to over 45 minutes of entertainment," an advertisement for the podcast posted to a hacking forum called Nulled reads. "Join us as we go on completely random tangents such as; Ring & Nest Trolling, telling shelter owners we killed a kitten, Nulled drama, and more ridiculous topics. Be sure to join our Discord to watch the shows live."

Software to hack Ring cameras has recently become popular on the forum.

The software churns through previously compromised email addresses and passwords to break into Ring cameras at scale.

This has led to a recent spate of hacks that have occurred both during the podcast and at other times, several of which have been covered by local media outlets. In Brookhaven a hacker shouted at a sleeping woman through her hacked Ring camera to wake up. In Texas, a hacker demanded a couple pay a bitcoin ransom. Hackers targeted a family in DeSoto County, Mississippi, and spoke through the device to one of the young children.



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Remember, the unauthorized access to images captured by the Ring cameras reported thus far have been of cameras in a fixed position. Now, though, these new Ring cameras are able to fly anywhere in the house, at any time!

Will Ring employees be able to fly the drone around without the homeowner's permission?

Will hackers be able to take control of the Ring drone and spy on users of the device?

Where will the videos and audio recorded by Amazon's new indoor drone be stored? How long will they be stored?

Will Amazon continue to give police access to the images without the obtaining of a warrant?

In the press release accompanying the debut of the drone, Ring declared:

Always Home Cam was built with privacy top of mind both in the physical design and the way it is used. The device rests in the base and the camera is physically blocked when docked. The camera will only start recording when the device leaves the base and starts flying via one of the preset paths.

The company goes on to assure customers that the Always Home drone-based camera "cannot be manually controlled," but that really isn't the issue.

The question that lingers is: What changes has Amazon made that will prevent its new "innovative" home surveillance device from being remotely controlled and the images it records being remotely captured?

If, as Siminoff wrote in the Always Home Cam press release, privacy is one of his company's "foundational principles," then the question I present above should be answered directly.

Otherwise, Amazon's new indoor drone could allow people with nefarious design to spy on customers when they are at their most vulnerable, and it could give law enforcement unwarranted access to the interior of the homes of citizens, when the citizens were not at home at impede such an inspection.

The Always Home Cam costs \$249.99 and is expected to launch next year.

Joe Wolverton II, J.D., is the author of the books The Real James Madison and "What Degree of Madness?": Madison's Method to Make America STATES Again. His latest book — The Founders' Recipe — provides selections from the 37 authors most often quoted by the Founding Generation. He hosts the YouTube channel "Teacher of Liberty" and the Instagram account of the same name.



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