Cardenas, Jovani

"Have an Echo or Ring device? Amazon may help itself to your Wi-Fi" Summary

As more and more smart devices are being integrated into homes, connectivity is important. Certain smart devices fall a bit short of the user's Wi-Fi range. This is frequently encountered with smart security cameras, smart locks, or smart lights that are on lawns. This can cause connectivity issues and interrupt their purpose. If connectivity is disconnected with smart lights, it may not be a dire situation but in the case of smart locks and smart security cameras, it is critical that these devices remain on and with a steady connection to the user's Wi-Fi. To combat poor Wi-Fi connectivity and ensure seamless user interface, Amazon created Sidewalk.

Sidewalk is Amazon's solution to ensure all smart devices have a steady connection to the user's Wi-Fi by utilizing bandwidth of neighboring Wi-Fi networks that have some sort of Amazon smart device. There exist several issues with this protocol as it can potentially allow your network to be compromised via a neighbor's network. In addition, a bigger problem is how Amazon activated this option by default on all Amazon devices without any notification in-app. Amazon states it sent emails to customers in November 2020, and in May 2021.

This is poor on Amazon's part as emails are currently flooded with spam, promotions, and other emails that this important notification can get easily lost. This type of marketing may be intentional as being more direct with Amazon Sidewalk may have produced more pushback from customers. This type of practice can affect anyone and can be abused by all types of businesses. Although technically Amazon notified customers, they did it in the most discrete way possible purposefully avoiding detection.

In addition, Amazon went ahead and turned on Sidewalk on all current Amazon devices with no prompt from users. This in conjunction with shady notifications gives precedent to companies to enabling features without your explicit consent and justifying themselves by stating they sent emails. This can be dangerous on government buildings as these smart devices are always on and potentially always listening, watching, and recording. This type of practice can also be damaging at the consumer level as people should not have to decide on making their home more practical at the expense of their privacy, bandwidth, and consent.