

Smart Speakers, Crime Stopper?

Written by Marco Attard
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Smart speakers might be able to do more than mere voice-based home control-- ABC News reports an alleged assault could have turned ugly if a smart home device did not inadvertently call the police.



The incident happened in a town outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico, where one Eduardo Barros was house-sitting a home with his girlfriend and daughter. According to the police, the couple got into an argument that got physical. At one point, Barros threatened to kill his girlfriend with a firearm, asking her "did you call the sheriffs?" An unspecified smart speaker connected to the house surround system picked up the message, recognised it as "call the sheriffs," and proceeded to do exactly that.

Thus, following the spot of Minority Report-style crime prevention, the police arrived at the scene. The girlfriend and daughter were saved, and crisis negotiation and SWAT teams managed to take Barros into custody after an "hours-long stand-off."

"The unexpected use of this new technology to contact emergency services has possibly helped save a life," the sheriff's department tells ABC News. "This amazing technology definitely helped save a mother and her child from a very violent situation."

Does this story mean smart speakers and other such hardware are the next big thing in crime prevention? Maybe... but then again, maybe not. After all, while such devices can theoretically provide evidence in criminal cases (such as the case where recordings from an Amazon Echo were used as evidence in an Arkansas murder case), but dialogue from a TV show or movie can trigger a smart speaker.

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Then issues involving privacy come into play-- after all, does one want a speaker connected to the servers of a global megacorporation monitor their every move? Either way, it appears the line between crime prevention and personal freedom is going to get increasingly blurry...

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