

# Amazon shares your web connection with your neighbors



## Tech Talk

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Amazon has a way of creeping into our lives and making things incredibly easy. With convenience, there are often trade-offs. Many people are unaware that they have a public profile on Amazon.

Your public profile is created automatically, whether you want it or not, and it contains your comments and any ratings that you have left on products purchased on Amazon. Your biographical information and other site interactions are also posted to your profile.

It seems that no matter where you go, something's tracking you. Your phone's GPS keeps tabs on you, security cameras have footage of you, and even doorbell cameras can turn neighborhoods into surveillance networks.

Amazon's Ring cameras are watching, and hundreds of police departments can tap into the footage.

Amazon recently emailed Ring and Echo owners to let them know that they've been opted in automatically to

its new Sidewalk initiative. It sounds promising, "Sidewalk." Before you accept the automatic entry, know the facts. Those might be enough for you to opt out.

## What is Sidewalk?

About a year ago, Amazon quietly announced a new product called Sidewalk, which is basically a mesh network that extends your Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connection range by up to a mile.

Sidewalk turns your Echo speakers and Ring gadgets into bridge devices. That gives internet-connected tech far from your router, like lights at the edge of your driveway, a real boost.

How exactly does that work? Sidewalk uses a "small portion" of your internet bandwidth to pass low-energy Bluetooth connections and 900 MHz radio signals across all those connected devices.

The list of devices includes Ring's Floodlight Cam, Spotlight Cam Wired and Spotlight Cam Mount from 2019 or later, along with most Echo models (including the Dot, Plus, Show, Dot for Kids and Studio) made after 2016.

## Amazon grabs your internet to use with others

Think of this as a smart Sidewalk-enabled neighborhood, borrowing bandwidth from you and your neighbors. The more households that join this network, the bigger it gets.

We want better Wi-Fi, and it's annoying when our connected devices don't work. You don't want your outdoor lights, motion sensors or security cameras going offline.

But at what cost? The first question is just how much of your bandwidth Sidewalk uses. Amazon says the total monthly data is capped at 500MB per account or the rough equivalent of streaming 10 minutes of HD video.

It's truly not very much. If 10 minutes a month can boost my connected devices, that sounds great. But wait, there's more.

## Is Sidewalk secure?

If you're worried about the potential privacy implications, good. Amazon promises the Sidewalk network uses three layers of encryption and that your neighbors won't be able to see your data.

They might say that, but many indi-

vidual smart gadgets aren't great when it comes to cybersecurity. All it takes is one compromised device for a hacker to get into your network. Ultimately, your tech will be connected to a network you can't control.

Bottom line: It may very well be secure, but the Internet of Things is notorious for insecure devices and no updates. There is no standard. I wouldn't trust it.

## My advice: Opt out and here's how

Not every compatible device will have access to Sidewalk yet. Check to see if Sidewalk is already enabled using the Alexa app on your phone.

First, visit either the iOS App Store or Google Play to ensure you have the latest version of the Alexa app installed. Once you've downloaded the app, sign in to your Amazon account and follow these steps:

1. Inside the Alexa app, tap **More** followed by **Settings**.
2. Tap **Account Settings**, followed by **Amazon Sidewalk**.
3. Turn **Amazon Sidewalk off** if you do not want to participate.

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