

## Police Demanding Amazon Alexa Recordings in Arkansas Murder Case

December 28, 2016 - Amazon's Alexa digital assistant may have made voice recordings that police want access to in an Arkansas murder investigation. The case brings up troubling privacy issues that all consumers should be aware of before they purchase or use any form of digital assistant.

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A "digital assistant" is a voice activated service that reacts to your voice commands. If you own an iPhone, you're probably familiar with Siri; which is Apple's digital assistant. Android and Windows devices have similar features.

Alexa is Amazon's digital assistant and it is included in several products sold by the retailer. These include Fire, the company's digital streaming device, and Echo, the company's digital assistant for the home. Unlike a cell phone, these devices are designed to work and respond on demand. That means they are always on and always listening for you to say something.

In the Arkansas case, James Bates of Bentonville, Arkansas is accused of strangling a coworker to death in his home. Mr. Bates also happened to have an Amazon Echo installed in his home.

Echo isn't supposed to record everything you say. You essentially wake the device up by calling out "Alexa" and then telling the device what you want to do. But these so-called smart devices have been known to make recordings without being notified to do so. In the case of Mr. Bates, they want to know if Alexa recorded anything that could be useful in his prosecution.

So far, Amazon has supplied the police with Mr. Bates purchase history and account information. But they are refusing to turn over any voice recordings they have stored on Amazon's servers.

We understand why Amazon might hold onto voice recordings for a short period of time. For instance, if you tell Alexa to order dog food through Amazon.com, they might hold onto that recording until the order has been delivered. But the idea that the company might be holding onto voice recordings for longer periods of time is quite troubling. After all, these are recordings that are being made inside your own home. That's the one area of the world you should be able to express your thoughts without having to worry about someone else listening in.

Amazon will allow users to delete their voice recordings by visiting [www.amazon.com/mycd](http://www.amazon.com/mycd). You can also call their customer service and ask to have them deleted. That's something we recommend you do regularly if you own a product that includes Alexa. But this advice isn't just related to Amazon products. Google and other companies also make devices used for home automation that are similar to Echo. All of these devices create similar privacy concerns. If you own any of these devices, you need to learn how they work and how you can protect yourself from prying ears.

byJim Malmberg

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