

Ring's new data request policy adds needed transparency but larger questions over police partnership loom large

Article

The news: Ring will start **requiring** law enforcement agencies to make public their requests for user data gathered by the company's smart doorbells and cameras.

Under the new requirements, requests from police and other public safety agencies will be made viewable through a feed in Ring's **Neighbors** app. Ring will also **reportedly** prohibit agencies from deleting or removing posts and will let users view a history of data requests made by specific agencies. In the past, agencies could contact individuals through the app to request their data. Ring claims these changes are an attempt to increase "transparency and accountability" on its service.

How we got here: Advocates and scholars have **criticized** Ring and its Neighbors app for partnering with law enforcement, which they claim foments unjustified fears of crime and reinforces existing racial biases.

- For context, Ring partnered with at least **2,014** law enforcement agencies across 48 US states, **according to** The Financial Times.
- In the first half of 2020, Amazon **received** a record number of information requests (**3,105**) from US law enforcement, comprising subpoenas, search warrants, and court orders.
- That figure dropped in the **second half** of the year, but only slightly, to **3,060** requests.

What's the catch? Though Ring's new transparency requirements make law enforcement requests more public, it's unclear whether that will have any meaningful effect on the total number of requests issued or how the data is ultimately used by law enforcement.

- Instead, the decision will **most immediately benefit Ring itself**, which can claim its improving transparency without grappling with the thornier, more important question surrounding the efficacy of its nonpublic police partnership **agreements**.

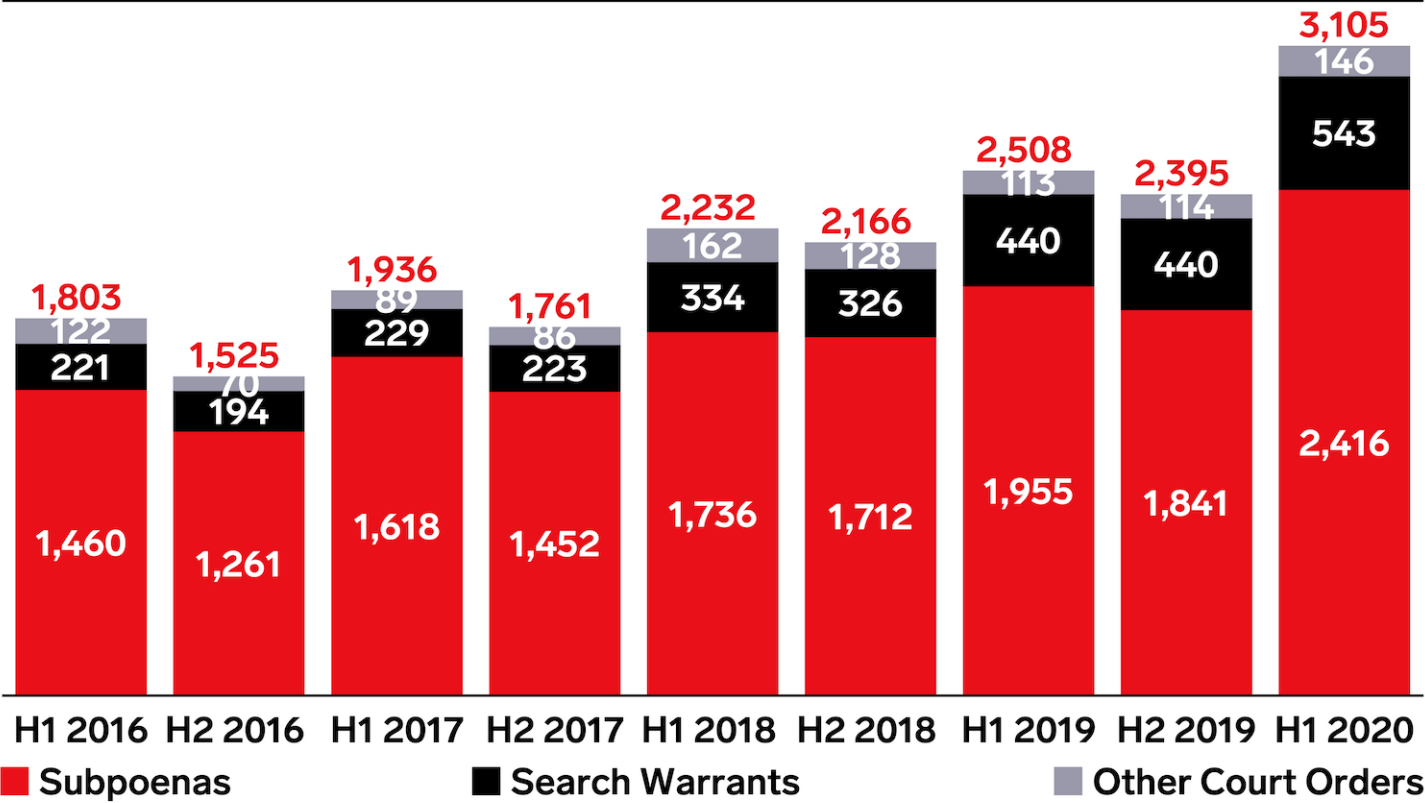
The bigger picture: Large tech firms are trying to publicly distance themselves from law enforcement in an effort to rebuild dwindling public trust.

Earlier this year Amazon **announced** it would indefinitely continue its moratorium on police use of its **Rekognition** facial recognition service. Amazon's original announcement paved the way for similar policy changes at **Microsoft** and **IBM** and came amid **record low** public confidence in US police departments. With numerous **polls** and **surveys** detailing rising public mistrust of tech companies, cutting police partnerships or adding transparency are ways tech companies like Amazon can improve their dwindling public trust.

The bottom line: Ring’s transparency measures may marginally improve trust, but its bevy of police partnerships could present a longer-term challenge to building back reputational trust with consumers.

US Law Enforcement Information Requests to Amazon

Number of law enforcement data requests



Source: Amazon, 2020

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