

# Amazon's Sidewalk network shares home Wi-Fi with strangers, triggers privacy concerns

Article

Amazon is launching its Sidewalk wireless mesh service on June 8, [per](#) Ars Technica. Once it flips the switch, Amazon will turn all compatible devices in the US into a massive distributed

network and location tracking system anchored on its customers' private Wi-Fi connections.

**Amazon Sidewalk turns existing Echo smart speakers, Ring doorbells, and security cameras into Sidewalk bridges that can amplify and share Wi-Fi signals.** Devices are set to join these networks by default, putting the onus on end-users to opt-out by June 8 when the service launches.

**Amazon is leveraging its massive US Echo smart speaker install base of 58.3 million units.** Echo speakers, Ring Video Doorbells, Ring Floodlight Cams, and Ring Spotlight Cameras sold since 2018 all have the ability to serve as Sidewalk bridges, even if the feature, which sends long-range, low-bandwidth signals on the 900 MHz band, will only be enabled when Sidewalk launches next week.

**Amazon's rationale for enabling Sidewalk is it can maintain Wi-Fi connections to smart home devices and Tile trackers even if individual ISPs fail.** This Mesh network ostensibly tracks Tile key fobs attached to pets and valuables. When Apple launched its competing AirTags trackers and FindMy service in April, it pointed out that its system can find lost items using an ad-hoc network of Apple iOS and Mac devices, but without exposing personal data. While Amazon doesn't have billions of iPhones constantly connected to networks, it does have its Echo speakers and various IoT devices at its disposal.

**Amazon's heavy-handed way of opting in customers into Sidewalk can alienate users.** Some Amazon users who tried to opt out of the rollout were dismayed to find out they were opted in again. Millions of users unaware of this development, or lacking the knowledge to opt-out, will be unwittingly participating in Sidewalk whether they want to or not.

**This development underscores one of the reasons for the drop in trust in technology companies that don't always act in a transparent and trustworthy manner.** Anne Toth, director of Amazon's Alexa Trust, acknowledged that "the future we envision for Alexa is not possible unless we earn and continually re-earn our customers' trust in us." The way Amazon is deploying Sidewalk—by sidestepping customer consent—runs counter to this. "Lighting up a massive IoT network with the flick of a switch means Amazon is poised to become a smart home gatekeeper," noted Sara M. Watson, senior analyst at Insider Intelligence, "allowing third party partners like Tile to access its network for added functionality."

# Smart Speaker Users, by Brand

## US, 2020

### Amazon Echo

millions	58.3
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### Google Home

millions	26.5
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### Other

millions	15.4
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Source: eMarketer, July 2020

eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com