

'Ring' has a new mission: 'Hey, there's raccoons in my backyard'

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

For years, "Ring" touted its crime-fighting bona fides, selling smart doorbells that let homeowners remotely monitor their residences—and sometimes share what they recorded with local police. Now the

Amazon.com Inc. unit is looking to transform itself into a smart-camera business with a cheery social-media side hustle, sort of a mashup between Nextdoor and TikTok.

Previously, users mostly shared videos of suspicious activity on Ring's Neighbors app or browsed a map of police investigations. They still do, but now they're more likely to post whimsical clips of pets, water balloon fights, a neighbor wearing a dinosaur costume.

"Reduce crime in neighborhoods" was Ring's original mission statement. Now it's "Keeping people close to what's important."

It's a big strategy shift, and one that seems to be working so far. Ring "recently" became profitable, according to Chief Executive Officer Liz Hamren, thanks to a recurring stream of subscription revenue from people willing to pay as much as \$20 a month to save and share videos captured by their devices.

"People want that recorded video," said Hamren, who revealed Ring's new mission statement in an interview Wednesday with Bloomberg Television. "We have a really healthy subscription business."

In each of the last three years, Ring either raised prices on some [subscription plans](#) or placed previously free features behind a paywall, moves that coincide with Amazon's effort to turn its sprawling consumer electronics division into a sustainable business after pouring billions into the Alexa digital assistant.

About half of recent video doorbell buyers in the U.S. reported purchasing a Ring device, according to Parks Associates, which surveys buyers of smart-home devices. Ring is the largest smart camera maker and the second-largest seller of security systems, according to the researcher. The company has also made strides with its paid security

monitoring services, which now trail only ADT Inc. in market share.

Ring's pivot will come as little surprise to anyone familiar with the company's travails. Founded by Jamie Siminoff in 2011 and acquired about seven years later by Amazon for \$839 million, Ring's crime-fighting focus soon became a public-relations liability. Civil liberties groups accused the company of building a private surveillance network vulnerable to abuse by the [law enforcement agencies](#) keen to get their hands on video captured by Ring devices.

Internal employee guidance from Ring's early days, reviewed by Bloomberg, sketched out a product lineup suitable for a high-tech fortress: concentric circles of protection around the front door (internet doorbells), the home (standalone cameras) and the neighborhood (the Neighbors app). Ring veterans say the guidance could be stifling, limiting the time they could devote to new features that might be useful to homeowners but lacked a clear home-security purpose.

The company also suffered embarrassing security lapses, including attacks by hackers exploiting weak user passwords to hijack cameras and employees watching unencrypted user videos. Amazon paid \$5.8 million to settle Federal Trade Commission charges related to those episodes, even as it denied violating the law. The company in recent years mandated more secure two-factor authentication for users and began offering end-to-end encryption.

Last year, Siminoff left Ring and was replaced by Hamren, a former Microsoft Corp. executive and alumnus of Dropcam, which made internet-connected cameras before being acquired by Google's Nest division. Besides running Ring, Hamren also oversees Amazon's Blink camera, Key in-home delivery services and Sidewalk wireless network.

Hamren, 52, lost little time loosening Ring's ties to law enforcement.

Earlier this year, the company removed a tool in the Neighbors app that had let police departments request footage directly from doorbell owners. The move was part of a broader push to turn the app into more of a community hub. Hamren says Ring remains focused on home-monitoring technology and currently has no plans to move into such smart-home devices as thermostats.

"It's not about home control, it's not about managing your home, it's about what's happening," she said. "That's like, 'Hey, there's raccoons in my backyard. Six packages got delivered. There's three cars in your driveway.'"

One vestige of Ring's crime-fighting days lingers on, a flying indoor drone that can zoom around the home and investigate suspicious noises. When it was unveiled in 2020, Ring released a video of the drone chasing off a would-be burglar as the resident watched on a smartphone.

Initially set to debut in 2021, the device remains in limbo. One person familiar with its development, speaking on the condition of anonymity, likened the Ring Always Home Cam to a concept car, a hype-building technology that may never hit the market.

Hamren insists Ring still plans to release the drone. She said she recently saw a demo of the device, and that engineers have been working to make it quieter and to ensure it doesn't slam into anything in homes with low or high ceilings, curved walls or mirrors. The challenge of navigating uncommon floor plans also delayed Amazon's Astro home robot, which remains an invitation-only product.

The drone simply wasn't ready to ship, Hamren said. "We have to be confident that it works in every home."

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