

Swiss police raid over hack on U.S. security-camera company

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Swiss authorities on Monday confirmed a police raid at the home of a Swiss software engineer who took credit for helping to break into a U.S. security-camera company's online networks, part of what the activist hacker cited as an effort to raise awareness about the dangers of mass surveillance.

The Federal Office of Justice said regional police in central Lucerne, acting on a legal assistance request from U.S. authorities, on Friday carried out a house search involving hacker Tillie Kottmann.

The hacker said online that electronics devices were seized during the raid. The Swiss office declined to specify the location or comment further, deferring all questions to "the relevant U.S. authority."

The FBI said in a statement Friday it was "aware of the law enforcement activity conducted in Switzerland" but had no further comment.

Kottmann had identified as a member of a group of "hacktivists" who say they were able to view live

camera feeds and peer into hospitals, schools, factories, jails and corporate offices for much of Monday and Tuesday last week after gaining access to the systems of California startup Verkada. They said the action was aimed at raising awareness about mass surveillance.

Verkada later locked them out by disabling all internal administrator accounts that the hackers had accessed using valid credentials found online. The company alerted law enforcement and its customers.

Kottmann, who uses they/them pronouns, said on the social media site Mastodon last week that the raid wasn't specifically about the Verkada hack but was tied to an earlier FBI investigation. Kottmann has previously attracted attention for leaking hacked material to expose security flaws, including from U.S. chipmaker Intel last year.

It's common for professional cybersecurity researchers to probe online systems for security flaws, though "hacktivists" often take that a step further by publicly exposing security risks or leaked materials to effect social change.

Kottmann didn't immediately return requests for comment.

Verkada, based in San Mateo, California, has pitched its cloud-based surveillance service as part of the next generation of workplace security. Its software detects when people are in the camera's view, and a "Person History" feature enables customers to recognize and track individual faces and other attributes, such as clothing color and likely gender. Not all customers use the facial recognition feature.

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