

How smart devices are outsmarting criminals

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

What are these things? What do they do?

1. pacemaker
2. Fitbit
3. Amazon Echo

2 Key words

Find key words in the article that match the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. the illegal use of fire to destroy a house, building or property _____ (para 3)
2. the crime of obtaining money from someone by tricking them _____ (para 3)
3. saying in a court of law whether you are guilty of a crime or not _____ (para 4)
4. people who commit crimes _____ (para 4)
5. ways of proving that you were somewhere else when a crime was committed and so can claim to be not guilty _____ (para 5)
6. waiting to be dealt with or completed _____ (para 15)
7. changed your mind about not allowing something to happen or not letting someone do something _____ (para 18)
8. made something less effective or successful _____ (para 19)
9. a written or spoken report about something that has happened _____ (para 19)
10. used to describe a crime that has features, such as the use of violence, that make it worse _____ (para 19)
11. the fact that something is present everywhere _____ (para 20)
12. not yet completed or dealt with _____ (para 22)
13. making more progress than someone or something else _____ (para 24)

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Inspector gadget: how smart devices are outsmarting criminals

Fitbits, pacemakers, Amazon Echoes – all are tools of the modern detective's trade in a world where our devices are always watching

Rory Carroll

23 June, 2017

- 1 Richard Dabate told police a masked intruder assaulted him and killed his wife in their Connecticut home. His wife's Fitbit told another story and Dabate was charged with the murder.
- 2 James Bates said an acquaintance accidentally drowned in his hot tub in Arkansas. Detectives suspected foul play and obtained data from Bates's Amazon Echo device. Bates was charged with murder.
- 3 Ross Compton told investigators he woke up to find his Ohio home on fire and climbed through a window to escape the flames. Compton's pacemaker suggested otherwise. He was charged with arson and insurance fraud.
- 4 All three men, besides pleading innocence, have one thing in common: digital devices may help put them behind bars and write them into criminal history as some of the first perpetrators caught by the internet of things.
- 5 Plenty more will surely follow because the connected devices we use for convenience, entertainment and health can also contradict our alibis and expose our lies.
- 6 Smart cars, fridges, doorbells, watches, phones, Fitbits, trainers, televisions, games consoles, coffee makers, pacemakers – a fast-growing list – can all monitor, record and be used as evidence.
- 7 "I think everyone realizes – good guys, bad guys, cops, robbers – that everything is being recorded or tracked somehow," Andy Kleinick, head of the Los Angeles Police Department's cyber crimes section and a supervisor for the secret service's LA electronic crimes task force, said in an interview.
- 8 "The internet of things has been explosive. We are being tracked all the time. If you don't know that, you're crazy."
- 9 "Is it more difficult to commit a murder? I'd imagine so. We do a lot of murder cases where people leave a lot of information – researching how to get rid of a body or googling *poison*," said Kleinick. You could do your research on a library computer, he said, but it won't do much good. "They track it, too." Vehicle navigation devices can also act as silent witnesses, recording turns, pauses and stops.
- 10 Kleinick and his team give courses to police officers and detectives in how to handle digital evidence and what to look for at crime scenes – a games console, for instance, can contain chat messages and child abuse images.
- 11 "We can't keep up with the demand. Soon, I'll be teaching full-time because the LAPD chief wants everyone to have some form of cyber-training," said Kleinick.
- 12 The old timers who don't understand cyber are mostly gone and new recruits, digital natives, adapt easily, he said. However, it takes a special type of person to work full-time in the cyber crimes section.
- 13 "I want someone who is happy sitting for ten hours a day examining bits of data. Some people go crazy doing that; some love it."
- 14 Richard Dabate claimed a would-be burglar beat him and shot his wife, Connie, in their home in Ellington, Connecticut, shortly before Christmas in December, 2015. But she was wearing a Fitbit that showed her walking 370 metres around the house well after the time her husband said she was shot.
- 15 When detectives checked her phone, they found a list titled: Why I want a divorce. Dabate's murder trial is pending.
- 16 Police in Bentonville, Arkansas, suspected foul play in the November, 2015 death of Victor Collins, who went to the home of James Bates to watch an American football game and wound up dead in a hot tub.
- 17 Bates had several internet-connected devices, including a Nest Thermostat and Amazon Echo. The Echo responds to voice commands and streams audio to the cloud, including a fraction of a second of audio before its "wake word".
- 18 Amazon initially resisted a police request for Echo data but relented after Bates approved the handover. Its relevance in the case is unclear. Bates's smart water device may also yield clues. It recorded 140 gallons of water use during the early hours of the night in question. Bates's murder trial is also pending.
- 19 Ross Compton said he was sleeping when his house in Middletown, Ohio, caught fire in September, 2016. He said he grabbed some possessions and jumped out of a window. Investigators pulled data from his pacemaker which, according to a cardiologist, undermined Compton's account. He has been charged with aggravated arson and insurance fraud.
- 20 Public awareness has yet to catch up with the ubiquity and implications of connected technology.

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- 21 Ring, an LA-based start-up, has sold about 1m video doorbells, which connect to smartphones and wi-fi networks. Jamie Siminoff, the company founder, showed the *Guardian* a video of a woman and a male companion ringing a bell in Monrovia, California, and then trying the handle. The absent homeowner, watching remotely, challenged them through the speaker. Startled, they fled.
- 22 The homeowner notified police who caught the couple, with a third person, at a traffic stop. The woman had an outstanding arrest warrant and was driving with a suspended licence. The car contained a loaded gun and an ounce of heroin.
- 23 But Brian Jackson, a criminal justice scholar at the Rand Corporation, said some police departments, especially smaller ones, struggle to keep pace with the technology. The US has more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies.
- 24 He also warned technology was outpacing debate over privacy. "The general public isn't aware of the full capabilities. It's a symptom of our love of technology and lack of detailed scepticism."
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3 Collocations

a. Match the words to make collocations from the article.

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. behind | a. gun |
| 2. crime | b. force |
| 3. cyber | c. play |
| 4. digital | d. scene |
| 5. foul | e. bars |
| 6. task | f. intruder |
| 7. insurance | g. witness |
| 8. loaded | h. fraud |
| 9. masked | i. licence |
| 10. silent | j. burglar |
| 11. suspended | k. crimes |
| 12. would-be | l. evidence |

b. Discuss the meaning of each collocation with a partner.

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4 Verb + noun phrases

Rearrange the letters in brackets to complete the verb + noun phrases from the article.

1. (tstmouar) _____ criminals
2. (ehcrga) _____ someone with murder
3. (esptusc) _____ foul play
4. (tcoitnrdca) _____ an alibi
5. (oepsxe) _____ a lie
6. (momtci) _____ a murder
7. (tge dri fo) _____ a body
8. (irstes) _____ a police request
9. (deily) _____ clues
10. (drenueinm) _____ someone's account

5 Role-play

- a. In pairs, invent a crime. Make notes, giving your account of what happened. Be sure to use some of the language from tasks 3 and 4.
- b. Report your crime to another pair of students, who play the role of investigators.
- c. Swap roles and listen to the other pair's crime report.
- d. Decide which crime report was most believable.

6 Discussion

- What smart devices do you use at home or at work?
- Should we be more aware of how closely we are monitored through our use of technology?
- Should data and information derived from smart devices be available to police, government agencies and prosecutors?
- How do you think policing and detective work is likely to change in the near future?
- Do you know of any other cases where criminals have been caught due to their own naivety, lack of forethought or careless mistakes?

7 Webquest

Find out more about *Inspector Gadget*, both the TV series and the film.

Watch a clip or a complete episode on the official *Inspector Gadget* YouTube channel:

www.youtube.com/user/TheOfficialGadget

What gadgets are used and what do they do?

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KEY

1 Warmer

Teacher's tip: If students do not know anything about these devices, get them to scan the article and find at least some basic information there.

1. a small piece of electronic equipment connected to someone's heart to help the heart muscles move regularly. Pacemakers can also monitor and record the heart's electrical activity and heart rhythm. Newer pacemakers can monitor blood temperature, breathing rate and other things.
2. an American brand of activity tracker usually worn like a watch on the wrist. It measures the wearer's activity data, e.g. number of steps taken, heart rate, sleep.
3. a hands-free speaker controlled by your voice. Echo plays music, makes calls, sends and receives messages, provides information, etc.

2 Key words

1. arson
2. fraud
3. pleading
4. perpetrators
5. alibis
6. pending
7. relented
8. undermined
9. account
10. aggravated
11. ubiquity
12. outstanding
13. outpacing

3 Collocations

1. e
2. d
3. k
4. l
5. c
6. b
7. h
8. a
9. f
10. g
11. i
12. j

4 Verb + noun phrases

1. outsmart
2. charge
3. suspect
4. contradict
5. expose
6. commit
7. get rid of
8. resist
9. yield
10. undermine

6 Discussion

Teacher's tip: This article has some entertaining examples of 'stupid criminals':

www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35785834.