Amazon Testing Facial Recognition Software with Law Enforcement

July 18, 2018 - Amazon has been providing its facial recognition software to law enforcement agencies. The company is running a pilot project with Orlando Police Department that is about to expand, and it has a lot of people concerned.

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The software, called Rekognition, was used on five video cameras in Orlando. The exact location of the cameras was not announced but based on the results of the initial pilot, OPD has decided to expand the program.

Once Amazon's roll was made public, it caused a lot of consternation. The ACLU wrote to the company in protest. Their position is that use of Rekognition by the police amounts to illegal surveylance. That position isn't likely to find a friendly audience if it ever makes is to court though. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that when people are out in public they have no presumption of privacy.

Amazon shareholders are also concerned that use of Rekognition by law enforcement agencies could open the company up to liability in the event someone is arrested due to an inaccuracy in the program. And that's a much more likely scenario.

Amazon's interest in facial recognition is commercial. The company already allows developers to use the software in applications. For instance, if you want to build an application that opens only when a particular individual is using it, Rekognition can be used as a means to identify the user. At some point it is likely that you'll walk into a store and facial recognition software will track you from the time you enter until you leave. This will allow retailers to build frighteningly accurate profiles on shoppers using brick and mortar establishments.

Interestingly enough, Microsoft called for regulation of facial recognition software and its uses last week. We have to agree that the time for a discussion on that is now. Do we really want to live in a country where every last detail of your life is stored in some database? We're already very close to that point but do we really want to go "all in."
byJim Malmberg
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