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Andrew Hoffman

Ring Inc. and Law Enforcement: The Cost of Keeping Neighborhoods Safe

Lily Smythe,ⁱ vice president of marketing at Ring, Inc., stared out at the Pacific Ocean from her office at Ring headquarters in Santa Monica, California. She had made sure to leave her house extra early that morning to beat the usual onslaught of Los Angeles commuter traffic so she could have a few minutes before her morning meeting to gather her thoughts. Smythe had put this meeting on the calendar with her Ring marketing team to discuss how to respond to a recent open letter calling into question Ring's coordination with local law enforcement agencies.

On October 7, 2019, a coalition of civil rights groups made public an open letter to local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies calling for an end to their partnership with Ring on the basis of risks to civil liberties, privacy, and civil rights (see **Exhibit 1**). Smythe and her team believed their response would have important implications for the future of the camera-enabled doorbell company. Smythe saw these partnerships as key to the growth and future success of Ring and the company's response would be equally important to assuage current customers.

Smythe also thought about the future of Ring with regard to public reception about instant personal identification. Amazon.com, the parent company of Ring, had recently filed patents for Rekognition, a facial-identification software that could enhance the powers and value of Ring doorbells.¹ Historically, Amazon had taken a hands-off approach to managing its subsidiary companies, but as owner, Amazon certainly could have final say in important strategic decisions.

How should Ring respond to the risks set forth in the open letter? What should the nature of Ring's relationship be with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies and how should these agencies be able to utilize the technology? Would features of Ring lead to biased profiling and false arrests? Did sharing information collected from Ring products constitute a violation of privacy and civil liberties for citizens?

ⁱ Lily Smythe is a fictional character.

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