After Search Party backlash, Ring is still avoiding the bigger questions

In an interview with *The Times* this week, Siminoff explained that he understands people's concerns and that "maybe people were 'triggered' by an image in the ad that showed blue rings radiating out from suburban homes. There will be fewer maps in any future ads, he said."

Graphics in ads are not the problem. The problem is the potential for Ring's vast network of AI-powered camera technology to be turned into a surveillance tool, one accessible to law enforcement and capable of creating a record of people's movements that's searchable by AI (which itself raises concerns around reliability and hallucination). Ring is the only home security camera company to have built a system — called Community Requests — that allows its users to share footage directly with local police.

Ring maintains that its cameras are not being used to create a mass surveillance tool. According to the company, its privacy protections are robust, and users are fully in control of their videos, including whether they share them with law enforcement. But the company still hasn't fully addressed its users' fears.

Rather than continue to push his narrative that cameras will solve crime, Siminoff needs to acknowledge the real concerns people have and make it clear how far Ring is willing to take this powerful technology. He needs to explain where — and how — he will draw the line. Will Search Party stop at tracking humans?

Instead, he's doubling down on the ideas that more cameras are good and more video in the world is better – not surprising from someone who makes money by selling cameras. But he also told *The Times* that he thinks most people feel this way, even if they say otherwise.

"There's been a lot of cases recently where if the video had not been there, I'm not sure if the story would have been told the same or we wouldn't have known what happened," he told *The Times*, adding that what Ring does is "not just like unfettered mass surveillance."

The other concern is around what happens to its video after users share it with the police. While that's arguably not Ring's problem, the company has acknowledged that its mission "to make neighborhoods safer" carries significant responsibility. It created this technology and needs to ensure it's used responsibly.

The argument that camera owners have complete control of how their footage is shared puts the onus on the user. But Ring turned Search Party on by default for everyone, demonstrating that it has the control. There's also no guarantee that any current default settings will stay that way. Additionally, while the user can choose to share footage, the people captured by the cameras don't necessarily have that choice.

Siminoff confirmed to *The Times* that Ring will continue building out Search Party, saying that they're looking to add searching for cats to its capabilities. But then, what comes next?

All this technology is coming together at lightning speed, and to many, it feels like it's just one turn away from a dystopian surveillance system.

https://www.theverge.com/news/881339/after-search-party-backlash-ring-is-still-avoiding-the-bigger-questions