

## How smart devices are outsmarting criminals

### Level 2 • Upper intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

What are these things? What do they do?

1. pacemaker
2. Fitbit
3. Amazon Echo

#### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then, find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

perpetrator  
fled

scepticism  
fraud

arson  
intruder

assaulted  
remotely

alibi  
burglar

1. someone who enters a place where they are not allowed to go, especially to commit a crime \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
2. attacked someone violently \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
3. the illegal use of fire to destroy a house, building or property \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
4. the crime of getting money from someone by tricking them \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
5. someone who commits a crime \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
6. a way of proving that you were somewhere else when a crime was committed and so can claim to be not guilty \_\_\_\_\_ (para 5)
7. someone who enters a building illegally to steal things \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
8. from a distance \_\_\_\_\_ (para 17)
9. escaped very quickly \_\_\_\_\_ (para 17)
10. doubts that you have about something that other people think is acceptable \_\_\_\_\_ (para 19)

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#### Inspector gadget: how smart devices are outsmarting criminals

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 a friend accidentally drowned in his hot tub in Arkansas. Detectives suspected foul play and got 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 that was a lie. He was charged with arson and insurance fraud.
- 4 All three men said they were innocent but they have one more thing in common: digital devices may help put them behind bars and put them in the criminal history books as some of the first perpetrators caught in this way.
- 5 It's likely that many more perpetrators will be caught out by smart devices. The connected devices we use for convenience, entertainment and health can also show our alibis are not true and expose our lies.
- 6 Smart cars, fridges, doorbells, watches, phones, Fitbits, 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 and bad guys – that everything is being recorded or tracked," Andy Kleinick, the head of the Los Angeles Police Department's cyber crimes section, said in an interview.
- 8 "The increase in digital devices 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 have 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 They have a lot of work. "Soon, I'll be teaching full-time because the LAPD chief wants everyone to have some kind of cyber-training," said Kleinick.
- 12 Richard Dabate claimed a would-be burglar beat him and shot his wife, Connie, in their home in Ellington, Connecticut, in December, 2015. But she was wearing a Fitbit that showed her walking 370 metres around the house long after the time her husband said she was shot.
- 13 When detectives checked her phone, they found a list titled: Why I want a divorce. Dabate is waiting to go on trial for murder.
- 14 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 ended up dead in a hot tub.
- 15 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".
- 16 Ross Compton said he was sleeping when his house in Middletown, Ohio, caught fire in September, 2016. He said he picked up some possessions and jumped out of a window. Investigators found data on his pacemaker which showed Compton was probably lying. He has been charged with arson and insurance fraud.
- 17 In Los Angeles, a new company called Ring has already 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, asked them what they were doing through the speaker. They were shocked and they fled.
- 18 The homeowner called the police who caught the couple, with a third person, at a traffic stop. The woman was driving with a suspended licence. The car contained a loaded gun and heroin.

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19 But Brian Jackson, a criminal justice scholar at the Rand Corporation, warned that technology was moving faster than the debate over privacy. "The general public isn't aware of the full

capabilities of these devices. It's a symptom of our love of technology and lack of scepticism."

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### 3 Collocations

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

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. behind     | a. gun      |
| 2. crime      | b. cases    |
| 3. cyber      | c. play     |
| 4. digital    | d. scene    |
| 5. foul       | e. bars     |
| 6. murder     | 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.

### 4 Comprehension check

Explain what happened in each criminal case and how the perpetrators were caught out by electronic devices. Use the key words and collocations from tasks 2 and 3 where possible.

case 1 – Connecticut

case 2 – Arkansas

case 3 – Ohio

case 4 – California

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#### 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 cases where criminals have been caught due to their silly 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](http://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.

- 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.
- 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.
- a hands-free speaker controlled by your voice. Echo plays music, makes calls, sends and receives messages, provides information, etc.

#### 2 Key words

- intruder
- assaulted
- arson
- fraud
- perpetrator
- alibi
- burglar
- remotely
- fled
- scepticism

#### 3 Collocations

- e
- d
- k
- l
- c
- b
- h
- a
- f
- g
- i
- j

#### 4 Comprehension check

(possible answers)

##### case 1 – Connecticut

Although Dabate told the police that his wife had been shot and killed in their home by masked intruder and that the perpetrator also assaulted and beat him, the fitness tracker that his wife was wearing provided digital evidence that she had been walking around the house a long time after her husband said the crime had happened. This information led to investigators not believing the story about a would-be burglar and to Dabate being charged with his wife's murder.

##### case 2 – Arkansas

Victor Collins went to the house of his friend James Bates to watch an American football game. While there, he drowned in a hot tub. Bates said it was an accident but police suspected foul play. In what turned out to be another murder case, Bates's voice-controlled Amazon Echo acted as a silent witness to what really happened in the house that day.

##### case 3 – Ohio

Ross Compton is likely to end up behind bars for arson and insurance fraud. He told investigators that, when he woke up, his house was already on fire and that he had to jump out of the window to escape. The data on Compton's pacemaker, however, told a different story. This digital evidence led investigators to disbelieve Compton's version of events.

##### case 4 – California

A video doorbell system showed images of a man and a woman trying to illegally enter a house. The homeowner, who had had the system installed, was watching what was going on remotely and, through the integrated speaker, asked what the man and the woman were doing. The would-be burglars were so shocked that they fled the scene. The homeowner then alerted the police who caught the couple in their car and found out that, despite being the driver, the woman did not have a valid driving licence and that there was a loaded gun and illegal drugs in the car.

#### 6 Discussion

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

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35785834](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35785834).