

How smart devices are outsmarting criminals

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / 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 will help you.

arson

charged

fraud

intruder

investigator

1. someone who enters a place where they are not allowed to go, especially to commit a crime _____ (para 1)
2. officially accused of committing a crime _____ (para 1)
3. someone whose job is to officially find out the facts about something, especially a crime or an accident _____ (para 3)
4. the illegal use of fire to destroy a house _____ (para 3)
5. the crime of getting money from someone by tricking them _____ (para 3)

divorce

evidence

expose

device

tracked

6. a machine or piece of equipment that does a particular thing _____ (para 5)
7. show something that was hidden _____ (para 5)
8. facts or physical signs that help to solve a crime _____ (para 6)
9. followed; watched _____ (para 7)
10. a legal way of ending a marriage _____ (para 13)

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Inspector gadget: how smart devices are outsmarting criminals

Rory Carroll

23 June, 2017

- 1 Richard Dabate told police that a masked intruder attacked him and killed his wife in their Connecticut home. His wife's Fitbit showed he was lying and Dabate was charged with the murder.
- 2 James Bates said a friend accidentally drowned in his hot tub in Arkansas. Detectives didn't believe him and got data from Bates's Amazon Echo. Bates was charged with murder.
- 3 Ross Compton told investigators that, when he woke, his Ohio home was on fire. He said he jumped through a window to escape the fire. Compton's pacemaker suggested that he didn't. He was charged with arson and insurance fraud.
- 4 Digital devices may help put all three men in jail. They are some of the first criminals to be caught in this way.
- 5 The connected devices we use to make our lives easier, for entertainment and for our health can also 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 recorded or tracked," said Andy Kleinick, the head of the Los Angeles Police Department's cyber crimes section.
- 8 "We are tracked all the time. If you don't know that, you're crazy."
- 9 "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 help you. "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 about digital evidence and what to look for at crime scenes – a games console, for example, 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 cyber-training," said Kleinick.
- 12 Richard Dabate said that an intruder attacked 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, didn't believe James Bates's story. In November, 2015, Victor Collins went to Bates's home to watch an American football game and died in a hot tub.
- 15 Bates had several internet-connected devices, including an Amazon Echo. The Echo responds to voice commands and sends audio to the cloud, including less than 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 jumped out of a window to escape. Investigators looked at data from his pacemaker, which showed that Compton's story could not be true. He has been charged with arson and insurance fraud.

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3 Comprehension check

Are these sentences true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Police are using information from the devices we use every day to find out whether criminals are lying.
2. The information that devices record cannot be used to put criminals in jail.
3. Only crazy people think that we are all tracked by our devices.
4. Library computers cannot track what people use them for.
5. Even the navigation devices in our cars can be used in evidence.
6. Kleinick trains police officers to know what digital evidence to look for at crime scenes.
7. The LAPD chief does not think that this cyber-training is necessary.
8. Dabate, Bates and Compton are the first criminals to be caught by their devices.

4 Summaries

Use the key words from task 2 to complete the summaries about the cases.

case 1 – Connecticut

Dabate told the police that his wife was shot and killed in their home by an _____ (1). The Fitbit that his wife was wearing gave digital _____ (2) that she was walking around the house a long time after her husband said the crime had happened. Because of this information, investigators did not believe Dabate's story and Dabate was _____ (3) with his wife's murder. Information on his wife's phone also showed that she wanted to get a _____ (4).

case 2 – Arkansas

In November, 2015, Victor Collins went to James Bates's house to watch an American football game. While he was there, he drowned in a hot tub. Bates said it was an accident but police didn't believe him. A _____ (5) in his home, an Amazon Echo, _____ (6) his lies.

case 3 – Ohio

Ross Compton will probably go to prison for _____ (7) and insurance _____ (8). He told _____ (9) that, when he woke up, his house was on fire and that he had to jump out of the window to escape. But Compton's pacemaker _____ (10) his movements and told a different story.

5 Role-play

- a. In pairs, use some of the words from the article to invent a crime. Make notes to explain what happened.
- 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 the most believable.

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6 Discussion

- What smart devices do you use at home or at work?
- Which of these devices tracks or records what you are doing?
- How do you think policing and detective work is likely to change in the future?
- Do you know of any other cases where criminals have been caught because of their own 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

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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. intruder
2. charged
3. investigator
4. arson
5. fraud
6. device
7. expose
8. evidence
9. tracked
10. divorce

3 Comprehension check

1. T
2. F – The information that devices record **can** be used to put criminals in jail.
3. F – People who don't know that they are tracked by their smart devices are crazy (says Kleinick).
4. F – Library computers **can** track what people use them for.
5. T
6. T
7. F – The LAPD chief wants everybody at LAPD to have cyber-training.
8. F – Dabate, Bates and Compton are **some of** the first criminals to be caught by their devices.

4 Summaries

1. intruder
2. evidence
3. charged
4. divorce
5. device
6. exposed
7. arson
8. fraud
9. investigators
10. tracked

6 Discussion

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

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