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## A Tale of Unwanted Disruption: My Week Without Amazon



A locked Amazon Echo dot with the Amazon logo on it wrapped in a chain with a padlock

**O**n Wednesday, May 31, 2023, I finally regained access to my Amazon account after an unexpected and unwarranted lockout that lasted nearly a week, from Thursday, May 25. This wasn't just a simple inconvenience, though. I have a smart home, and my primary means of interfacing with all the devices and automations is through Amazon Echo devices via Alexa. This incident left me with a house full of unresponsive devices, a silent Alexa, and a lot of questions.

### **Unpacking the Cause**

The sequence of events that led to this digital exile began innocuously enough. A package was delivered to my house on Wednesday, May 24, and everything seemed fine. The following day, however, I found that my Echo Show had signed out, and I was unable to interact with my smart home devices. My initial assumption was that someone might have attempted to access my account repeatedly, triggering a lockout. I use a fairly old email address for my Amazon account, and it's plausible that an old password might have been exposed in a past data breach. However, I currently use strong, auto-generated passwords via Apple and employ two-factor authentication with an authenticator app, so unauthorized access seemed unlikely.

I swiftly checked my other accounts (social media, streaming apps, etc.) to ensure I hadn't been compromised. All seemed normal, with no flood of notifications from Microsoft Authenticator that would indicate an attempted breach. Puzzled, I followed the advice of the Amazon app and dialed the customer service number it provided. That's when things began to take a surreal turn.

### **An Unexpected Accusation**

The representative told me I should have received an email, which I indeed found in my inbox. It was from an executive at Amazon. As I dialed the number provided in the email, I half-wondered if Amazon was experiencing some issues and I was unwittingly falling into a scam.

When I connected with the executive, they asked if I knew why my account had been locked. When I answered I was unsure, their tone turned somewhat accusatory. I was told that the driver who had delivered my package reported receiving racist remarks from my "Ring doorbell" (it's actually a Eufy, but I'll let it slide).

### **Addressing the Problem**

Here's where things got even more baffling. First, I have multiple cameras recording everything that happens on my property. If the driver's claims were accurate, I could easily verify them with video footage. Second, most delivery drivers in my area share the same race as me and my family. It seemed highly unlikely that we would make such remarks. Finally, when I asked what time the alleged incident occurred, I realized it was practically impossible for anyone in my house to have made those comments, as nobody was home around that time (approximately 6:05 PM).

I reviewed the footage and confirmed that no such comments had been made. Instead, the Eufy doorbell had issued an automated response: "Excuse me, can I help you?" The driver, who was walking away and wearing headphones, must have misinterpreted the message. Nevertheless, by the following day, my Amazon account was locked, and all my Echo devices were logged out.

Let me be clear: I fully support Amazon taking measures to ensure the safety of their drivers. However, I question why my entire smart home system had to be rendered unusable during their internal investigation. It seems more sensible to impose a temporary delivery restriction or purchasing ban on my account. Submitting video evidence from multiple angles right after my initial call with the executive appeared to have little impact on their decision to disable my account.

### **The Fallout**

This incident has led me to question my relationship with Amazon. After nearly a decade of loyalty, I've been given a harsh reminder that a misunderstanding can lead to such drastic measures. It seems more reasonable to handle such issues in a more compartmentalized way, rather than a blanket shutdown of all services.

Due to this experience, I am seriously considering discontinuing my use of Amazon Echo devices and will caution others about this incident. This ordeal has made a case for a more personalized home assistant system, perhaps utilizing Raspberry Pi devices scattered around the house.

### **The Resolution**

Despite promptly submitting video evidence immediately upon learning of the issue, my account remained locked. The timing couldn't have been worse: the onset of Labor Day weekend was approaching, and I was keen to resolve the issue before the long weekend. However, despite numerous calls and emails, it wasn't until Friday

afternoon that I received confirmation that the investigation had started. I was told to expect a response within two business days, meaning not until Tuesday of the following week at the earliest.

In the end, my account was unlocked on Wednesday, with no follow-up email to inform me of the resolution. This incident stands as a stark reminder of the need for better customer service and a more nuanced approach to incident management.

Through sharing my experience, I hope to encourage Amazon to reform and rethink their approach to handling such situations in the future. It's essential for customers to feel confident in the security and reliability of their services, especially when those services are integral to the functionality of their homes. It's time for Amazon to take a more customer-focused approach to problem-solving and conflict resolution.

**Update:** for those saying I'm okay with this happening to a "real racist" I'm not. If someone bought and paid for a device they should be able to use it at least on their own property/ if it doesn't hurt anyone else. I'm only pushing this story so that this WONT happen to any one else. Regardless of their race, religion, beliefs, if you paid for it you should OWN it.

Amazon

Smart Home

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