

Why Amazon is sending you pictures of your front porch

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Have you suddenly started getting porch snapshots from your Amazon delivery person? You're not alone.

Amazon has been quietly expanding a program over the past few months in which some of its delivery providers take a picture of where they put your package. The photo is included in the notice of delivery—either in an email or accessible in their Amazon account—received by shoppers so they know when it arrived and where to look for it.

The new service helps with a common customer pain point when getting deliveries at home—finding where a package was left while they're at work, especially if it was tucked behind a bush or flower pot to make it

less visible to would-be thieves. It also has the advantage of forcing drivers to prove that they've indeed brought the package to a customer's address.

Amazon Logistics Photo On Delivery is "one of many delivery innovations we're working on to improve convenience for customers," Amazon spokesperson Kristen Kish said.

The service also highlights the growing, if still small, reach of Amazon Logistics, the Amazon-controlled delivery network that is distinct from companies such as UPS, the U.S. Postal Service and FedEx with which Amazon contracts for the lion's share of its U.S. deliveries.

The Photo on Delivery program has existed for at least six months, but recently Amazon updated the delivery device and app used by delivery personnel in its Amazon Logistics delivery system—called Rabbit by drivers—so all Logistics drivers can take a photo. This has made the program more visible to a broader geographic swath of Amazon customers nationwide. It's currently available at least in the Seattle, San Francisco and Northern Virginia metro areas and only comprises a small portion of U.S. deliveries.

The photo notifications can also be kind of creepy, especially if customers don't realize delivery drivers have been taking these photos. While part of the Amazon Logistics protocol since May, previously customer could only find the photo by searching on their Amazon account and order history.

The feature rolls out as Amazon increasingly asks its customers to accept its constant presence in their homes, from a voice-activated speaker that records snippets of commands to a high-tech entry system that allows delivery personnel to enter their home.

For those who'd prefer not to have photos of their doors or shrubbery sent to them, customers can opt out of the service on the Amazon website under the help and customer service tab.

More: New Amazon Key lets the delivery driver leave packages inside the front door

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Not a fix for theft

Photos still don't thwart thieves, an increasing problem as more shoppers take advantage of home delivery. In San Francisco, Annette Hurst recently got a photo of an Amazon package behind the planter at her front gate. Unfortunately, the text from the driver said it had been left on back porch.

Not only that, but the box disappeared before she got home. On the positive side, getting a replacement was no problem and the photo seemed to help when she described the theft to Amazon customer service, she said.

Amazon on Tuesday announced it was buying video doorbell maker Ring, which claims its product can deter package theft by allowing the homeowner to speak through the device's speaker to warn thieves they're on camera.

More: Amazon agrees to buy Ring, maker of video doorbells

More: Package theft hits nearly one-third of Americans. Is video

surveillance the answer?

You may be a frequent Amazon customer and never get a photo. The service is only active with packages delivered via Amazon's Amazon Logistics delivery system, which include Amazon Delivery Service Providers and Amazon Flex drivers. You can tell them apart because Amazon DSP deliveries usually come in white vans while Flex drivers use their personal vehicles.

The service isn't available for packages delivered by the U.S. Postal Service, UPS, FedEx or OnTrak because they use their own delivery routing and notification software. Most Amazon deliveries use these.

Amazon Logistics is Amazon's small but growing network of its own contractors. Most of the drivers for Amazon Logistics are local companies with as few as 10 vans.

The other type are short-term gig worker drivers who use the Rabbit app and deliver through the Amazon Flex program. They typically work three- to four-hour shifts.

Photos taken while delivery shouldn't have a life beyond the Rabbit device and app. Drivers upload them to Amazon's servers and never have access to them, it says. Amazon said it does not use the photos for any purpose but to send them to the customers and sometimes by customer service to troubleshoot delivery problems.

As more Americans shop online, they're finding the convenience of never battling a parking lot comes with unexpected trade-offs. Such as hunting for delivered packages. Another Amazon customer in San Francisco, Joanne Pearlstein, recently got an Amazon notification showing "a photo of my package ... at my neighbor's house."

In Oakland, Jack Whalen likes the feature because it tells him which of several obvious places a package might have been left at his house, on the porch at the side, a gate by the sidewalk or another gate that leads to the front door.

"We have had packages left at them all," he said.

Amazon says orders shipped to an address marked confidential, such as a Wish List or Registry address, don't include delivery photos to protect the privacy of the recipient or a surprise gift.

Roiling the delivery waters

The service is somewhat similar to what has been available in transportation management systems for several years, said John Haber, CEO of Spend Management Experts, an Atlanta-based supply chain management consulting firm.

As proof of delivery, firms will photograph pallets of freight before they are loaded, when they are loaded onto a vehicle and at the final destination. These photographs are typically used as not only proof of delivery but also for dealing with questions over damage claims.

Offering it to consumers could be a game-changer for the package delivery world because Amazon isn't charging for it.

"For UPS and FedEx, getting a delivery confirmation signature costs about \$5, it's a huge revenue generator. If Amazon's just offering it as standard proof of [delivery](#), will the other parcel carriers have to match it?" Haber said.

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