

TALES FROM THE NEAR FUTURE

Omnipresent AI cameras will ensure good behavior, says Larry Ellison

"We're going to have supervision," says billionaire Oracle co-founder Ellison.

BENJ EDWARDS – SEP 16, 2024 11:22 AM | 478



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On Thursday, Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison shared his vision for an AI-powered surveillance future during a company financial meeting, reports Business Insider. During an investor Q&A, Ellison described a world where artificial intelligence systems would constantly monitor citizens through an extensive network of cameras and drones, stating this would ensure both police and citizens don't break the law.

Ellison, who briefly became the world's second-wealthiest person last week when his net worth surpassed Jeff Bezos' for a short time, outlined a scenario where AI models would

analyze footage from security cameras, police body cams, doorbell cameras, and vehicle dash cams.

"Citizens will be on their best behavior because we are constantly recording and reporting everything that's going on," Ellison said, describing what he sees as the benefits from automated oversight from AI and automated alerts for when crime takes place. "We're going to have supervision," he continued. "Every police officer is going to be supervised at all times, and if there's a problem, AI will report the problem and report it to the appropriate person."

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Oracle's Larry Ellison says a surveillance system of police body cams, cameras on cars and autonomous drones, all monitored by AI, will constantly record and report on police and citizens, leading everyone to be on their best behavior

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The 80-year-old billionaire also predicted that AI-controlled drones would replace police vehicles in high-speed pursuits. "You just have a drone follow the car," he explained. "It's very simple in the age of autonomous drones."

Ellison co-founded Oracle in 1977 and served as CEO until he stepped down in 2014. He currently serves as the company's executive chairman and CTO.

Sounds familiar



→ Larry Ellison attends the Rebels With A Cause Gala 2019 at the Lawrence J Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine of USC on October 24, 2019, in Los Angeles. Credit: Phillip Faraone via Getty Images

While Ellison attempted to paint his prediction of universal public surveillance in a positive light, his remarks raise significant questions about privacy, civil liberties, and the potential for abuse in a world of ubiquitous AI monitoring.

Ellison's vision bears more than a passing resemblance to the cautionary world portrayed in George Orwell's prescient novel *1984*. In Orwell's fiction, the totalitarian government of Oceania uses ubiquitous "telescreens" to monitor citizens constantly, creating a society where privacy no longer exists and independent thought becomes nearly impossible.

But Orwell's famous phrase "Big Brother is watching you" would take on new meaning in Ellison's tech-driven scenario, where AI systems, rather than human watchers, would serve as the ever-vigilant eyes of authority. Once considered a sci-fi trope, automated systems are

already becoming a reality: Similar automated CCTV surveillance systems have already been trialed in London Underground and at the 2024 Olympics.

China has been using automated systems (including AI) to surveil its citizens for years. In 2022, Reuters reported that Chinese firms had developed AI software to sort data collected on residents using a network of surveillance cameras deployed across cities and rural areas as part of China's "sharp eyes" campaign from 2015 to 2020. This "one person, one file" technology reportedly organizes collected data on individual Chinese citizens, leading to what The Economic Times called a "road to digital totalitarianism."

Begging for GPUs

Ellison's prediction of AI-driven surveillance will rely on the development of powerful hardware, but shortages of AI-acceleration components like GPUs could slow them down. During the same Q&A last week, Ellison recounted a dinner with Elon Musk and Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang that he characterized as "me and Elon begging Jensen for GPUs," highlighting the intense demand for the chips. Ellison claimed they pleaded with Huang, saying, "Please take our money... we need you to take more of our money."

Surveillance isn't the only AI application that Ellison is excited about. As Big Tech companies race to inject AI models into what seems like every conceivable application, whether good or bad, Oracle has been no exception, recently launching several AI initiatives, like a partnership with Musk's SpaceX to bring AI to farming. The billionaire investor predicted during the meeting that over the next five years, companies will invest upwards of \$100 billion in building and training AI models, emphasizing the "astronomical" scale of the AI race.

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BENJ EDWARDS SENIOR AI REPORTER

Benj Edwards is Ars Technica's Senior AI Reporter and founder of the site's dedicated AI beat in 2022. He's also a tech historian with almost two decades of experience. In his free time, he writes and records music, collects vintage computers, and enjoys nature. He lives in Raleigh, NC.



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