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THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE 127.0.0.1 —

Kansas couple sues IP mapping firm for turning their life into a "digital hell"

Company fixed the error, but it may be years before the issue is resolved.

CYRUS FARIVAN - 8/10/2016, 1:58 PM



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Ever since James and Theresa Arnold moved into their rented 623-acre farm in Butler County, Kansas, in March 2011, they have seen "countless" law enforcement officials and individuals turning up at their farm day and night looking for links to alleged theft and other supposed crime. All of these people are arriving because of a rounding error on a GPS location, which wrongly points people to their farm.

In their [lawsuit](#) filed against [MaxMind](#), the IP mapping firm, the Arnolds allege:

The following events appeared to originate at the residence and brought trespassers and/or law enforcement to the plaintiffs' home at all hours of the night and day: stolen cars, fraud related to tax returns and bitcoin, stolen credit cards, suicide calls, private investigators, stolen social media accounts, fund raising events, and numerous other events.

[James Arnold has even been](#) "reported as holding girls at the residence for the purpose of making

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pornographic films.”

According to the suit, which was filed last Friday in Kansas federal court, all of these accusations were and continue to be false. Earlier this year, the news site Fusion revealed to the Arnold family and to the world why so many people continuously turn up at the Butler County farm.

As Fusion’s Kashmir Hill [reported](#):

As any geography nerd knows, the precise center of the United States is in [northern Kansas](#), near the Nebraska border. Technically, the latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates of the center spot are 39°50’N 98°35’W. In digital maps, that number is an ugly one: 39.8333333,-98.585522. So back in 2002, when MaxMind was first choosing the default point on its digital map for the center of the U.S., it decided to clean up the measurements and go with a simpler, nearby latitude and longitude: 38°N 97°W or 38.0000,-97.0000.

As a result, for the last 14 years, every time MaxMind’s database has been queried about the location of an IP address in the United States it can’t identify, it has spit out the default location of a spot two hours away from the geographic center of the country. This happens a lot: 5,000 companies rely on MaxMind’s IP mapping information, and in all, there are now over *600 million* IP addresses associated with that default coordinate. If any of those IP addresses are used by a scammer, or a computer thief, or a suicidal person contacting a help line, MaxMind’s database places them at the same spot: 38.0000,-97.0000.

And that precise GPS location is exactly where the Arnold family lives.

Randall Rathbun, the Arnolds’ lawyer, told Ars that this continues even now, months after Hill uncovered MaxMind’s error. “I think the last time the sheriff’s office was out was a month ago,” he said.

To its credit, MaxMind has since [fixed the error](#) in its IP databases by moving the location of a default IP address to the middle of a Kansas lake, but customers do not often update their data, so it could be many years before this issue is fully resolved.

David Robbins, a company spokesman, declined comment.

“Thanks for reaching out to us,” he said. “MaxMind is aware of the lawsuit but does not comment on pending litigation.”

The lawsuit seeks a judgement of at least \$75,000, but Rathbun told Ars that he would likely seek more in forthcoming filings.