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CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

Evolv Technologies FTC action over AI screening claims

IMPLEMENTED 2023–2024 · DEFENCE AND SECURITY · US · BAND F · PARTLY PROVED

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The US Federal Trade Commission alleged that a security-screening supplier made false or unsupported claims about its AI system. A settlement order followed, and the company did not admit wrongdoing, per CBS Colorado.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

What went wrong: Misleading AI claims.

AI used: Walk-through security screening scanners (Evolv Express) marketed as using cameras, sensors and artificial intelligence; the FTC alleged the AI claims were unsupported.

Implemented: 2023–2024. Grade: band F, Failure, Partly proved.

Headline result, as reported: FTC alleged Evolv made false or unsupported claims about its AI screening scanners; a settlement order was signed in December 2024, and the company did not admit wrongdoing

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 4 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Evolv Technologies. US supplier of walk-through security screening systems marketed as AI-powered and used in schools, hospitals and stadiums, per PYMNTS. Headcount and turnover are not given in the sources reviewed. Canvas block: 8. Governance and risk. Also 3. Customers and proposition.

Business challenge

The challenge. Schools and venues buy screening to keep weapons out. Evolv marketed its Express scanners as AI-powered weapons detection and, per the FTC's complaint, as more accurate, efficient and cost-effective than traditional metal detectors. The FTC alleged the company could not support these claims.

How it was addressed. The FTC brought a complaint alleging violations of Section 5 of the FTC Act and released a proposed settlement order on 26 November 2024. The order bars Evolv from making a set of claims about weapons detection, accuracy, false alarms, speed, labour costs and testing unless it has sufficient evidence, and requires it to let certain K-12 school customers cancel their contracts. Evolv said it had resolved the inquiry and would develop a Brand Integrity Program. [1] [2] [3] [4]

Who implemented it

In-house (In-house): Maker and seller of the Evolv Express scanners..
Customers named in sources include Douglas County, Colorado and a Kentucky school district.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: not established; the sources do not say how the system works. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Evolv Technologies, Evolv Express.

Where it was built in: Scanners installed at school, hospital and venue entrances; how the AI works is not described in the sources reviewed.

What changed

Before: Evolv marketed its scanners as AI weapons detection superior to metal detectors, per the FTC's complaint. After: an order signed by a judge, per an FTC attorney, bars the challenged claims unless Evolv has sufficient evidence, and lets certain school customers cancel. Evolv says the FTC did not challenge the core efficacy of its products. [1] [2] [3] [4]

Cost of failure

No monetary penalty reported in the sources reviewed. Customers' spending, as reported: nearly $1 million for a one-year trial in a Colorado county (CBS Colorado) and $17 million by one Kentucky district (EFF). Evolv's own cost: Not reported.

What it saved

Not reported. [1] [2] [3] [4]

Governance and control

The FTC acted under Section 5 of the FTC Act, and the order includes recordkeeping, monitoring and reporting requirements. Evolv's own controls over its marketing claims, and customers' checks of vendor claims, are not reported beyond the company's plan for a Brand Integrity Program.

S2 · Accountable owner · Not reported
Not reported.

A1 · Safe use · Not reported
Not reported.

A2 · Human in the loop · Not reported
Not reported.

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
The FTC order includes recordkeeping, monitoring and reporting requirements. [2]

A4 · Vendor AI · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
The FTC alleged Evolv could not support its performance claims to buyers. [2] [3]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
Not reported.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
The FTC acted under Section 5 of the FTC Act and its AI marketing enforcement effort. [2]

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Not reported.

DID NOT

– The FTC alleged that Evolv made false or unsupported claims about how well its system detects weapons and ignores harmless items compared with metal detectors, per Covington's summary of the complaint.

– The FTC alleged that presenting Express as a weapons detection system rather than a metal detector was solely a marketing distinction, as quoted by EFF.

– The FTC alleged the scanners raised alarms on common harmless items, as reported by PYMNTS.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the technology performs better than metal detectors; the order does not decide this.

– How many customers used the cancellation option.

– Whether Evolv's changes to its marketing have changed customer outcomes.

Timeline

2023 Douglas County commissioners approve nearly $1 million for a one-year trial of Evolv screening at a Colorado school [3]

Nov 2024 FTC releases a proposed settlement order with Evolv, alleging false or unsupported claims [2]

Nov 2024 Evolv announces a resolution of the FTC inquiry; the company did not admit wrongdoing, per CBS Colorado [3]

Dec 2024 A judge signs the order, per an FTC attorney quoted by CBS Colorado [3]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: F, Failure. Proof: Partly proved. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band F, a regulator's action over AI marketing claims in a safety product,

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The regulator's focus was the claims made when selling AI, and the settlement did not decide how well the system works. Buyers cannot separate the AI's contribution from the hardware using these sources. Before copying a purchase, a leadership team should ask what independent testing supports a vendor's accuracy claims and what contract rights follow if claims prove unsupported.

1. Ask suppliers for independent test evidence of every AI claim.
2. Write exit rights into multi-year safety technology contracts.
3. Record what a vendor claimed at the point of sale.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Regulator action reported by secondary sources: a law-firm summary of the FTC release, EFF commentary and news reports; the FTC's own pages did not open.

Evaluation method. Regulator action and settlement order, reported by a law firm's commentary, an advocacy organisation and news outlets. The allegations were not adjudicated; the company did not admit wrongdoing, per CBS Colorado.

Sources disagree. The FTC alleged Evolv deceptively advertised that its scanners would detect all weapons and that AI made them superior to metal detectors. Evolv said the FTC did not challenge the core efficacy of its products and that the focus was how the technology was described in historical marketing materials.

Status. Settled: order signed by a judge in December 2024, per an FTC attorney quoted by CBS Colorado.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/evolv-technologies-ftc-ai-weapons-screening

[1] Electronic Frontier Foundation: FTC Rightfully Acts Against So-Called AI Weapon Detection Company Evolv
https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2024/12/ftc-rightfully-acts-against-so-called-ai-weapon-detection-company-evolv

[2] Inside Global Tech (Covington): FTC Settles Case Against Provider of AI-Enabled Security Systems
https://www.insideglobaltech.com/2024/12/18/ftc-settles-case-against-provider-of-ai-enabled-security-systems/

[3] CBS News Colorado: FTC takes action against company over weapons detection claims
https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/company-false-claims-weapons-detection-system-colorado-stem-school

[4] PYMNTS: FTC: Evolv Oversold Abilities of AI-Powered Weapon Detector
https://www.pymnts.com/legal/2024/ftc-evolv-oversold-abilities-of-ai-powered-weapon-detector/

Evolv Technologies website: https://www.evolv.com

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