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Investigative Telephonics and Traplines- Part 1

Posted By Dean A. Beers, CLI on April 27, 2009

Legally using telephonic information to find your skips and determine useful information.

Over 20 years ago, when I started my investigative agency, I asked as many investigators as I could what the most valuable tool in their arsenal was. The dominant answer (other than our skills) was the telephone. About 10 years ago I asked the same question and was surprised that it was the computer, and all the accessible information. At that time I still thought the telephone was the most useful tool. When I ask that question today it is usually the computer followed by the telephone. With many of the changes that have taken place regarding the access, or lack thereof, to information, many investigators have turned back to the 'old' methods of the telephone. In my opinion the answer is both. We can now take the benefits of the telephone and computer and develop some unique tools. The key is to first understand that virtually every person and business has a telephone, especially cell phones.

Technology has seen some significant changes since I presented my original article on traplines. Some are to our favor and others work against us. I hope to impart some new wisdom that I have experienced in the most recent several months. The toll-free trapline is a very useful and powerful tool. You no longer need a telephone number to call and pretext; you can now take advantage of cell phones, text messaging, email, website contact forms, social networking sites, and other forms of communications. The goal is to get your trapline number to the subject and entice them to call it. I freely endorse the vendors I mention in this article, but I am not compensated in any manner or responsible for the services they provide.

The idea is that your subject will call your trapline number, at least identifying the number they have called from, and possibly the subscriber name and address. This will work even if they call and hang-up without completing the call. Of course a message is nice – often telling you when they are home (or at work) and verifying certain information (i.e. non-published numbers, spouses, etc). If they call from the number that you initially called, you have located them (subject to verification); if they call from a different number, it is likely either a work or home number. Those that are suspicious will call from a friend, relative, payphone, or hopefully from work or home. Oftentimes they will leave a different number to call – sometimes a pager, cell phone, friend's, or relative's.

The premise is that calls to toll-free numbers are similar to collect calls. When you have a toll-free number, you are essentially agreeing to accept the charges for the long-distance call and are therefore entitled to the number calling you. The billing company must provide the subscriber data for calls on your bill. That is a headache, time consuming and, in our line of work, just not practical to wait for the phone bill. Unlike your common toll-free number and phone bill, which gives you information monthly, your trapline account can notify you by fax, email, website, pager or even connect your caller to you. The use of this is perfectly legal – the pretext you use to get the return call may or may not be, and caution should be used. Illegally obtained

information is both a crime and inadmissible as evidence, together with any consequentially developed information. Keep in mind – the fruit of the poisonous tree.

An old trick smarter subjects used was to call a suspect toll-free number via payphone, calling card (not many allow this, some do), or an Internet long distance service (i.e. Net2Phone). Sometimes, especially with calling cards or PC based telephone services, only a one or two digit number or a non-working number is ‘trapped’. The current trend is to use prepaid cell phones and VoIP telephone services (i.e. Vonage, MagicJack, etc.). When ‘trapped’ these may leave a number that is not reversible to the subscriber or the main ‘trunk line’ number (common on PBX phones). If a complete number is provided it will usually not have a subscriber name and will not lead to an address via common search methods. It is new information that should further assist you in your investigation and there are methods to obtain additional information.

Related concerns are services offered by phone companies: Caller-ID, Anonymous Call Rejection, Caller Screening, etc. These services are designed to require you to disclose who you are to the party you are calling or attempting to locate – not exactly in our best interests. How do you get around this? Most use calling cards (try them first), or a ‘Blindline’ offered by any of the toll-free and trapline companies. On the Caller-ID, the calling card usually appears as ‘Anonymous’ or ‘Out of Area’ and the ‘Blindline’ usually returns a generic office number. You can also use this feature with Kall8, as detailed below.

A word of caution about forwarding numbers. Many years ago, more than I care to remember, you could forward a number and be anonymous. This is no longer the case. For example, if you forward your office number to a cell phone or toll-free number and then call your office number from a third phone, that originating number will show up on the Caller-ID. This bit of information is handy to know because that also means our subjects cannot use call forwarding to hide from our traplines.

Deciding which service is right for you depends on your needs and the size of your office. I used commercial trapline companies for many years and still recommend their use. If you have a large business, account volume, and multiple employees, I recommend using a commercial service. The other consideration is if you have the need to send pre-paid calling cards, which are only available through a commercial service [see Calling Cards]. These turnkey solutions come with monthly and per call costs that do have associated benefits. If you have low volume and few employees, you can gain many customizable features and cost savings creating your own trapline system, such as with www.kall8.com.

MY PERSONAL PICKS: MAJICJACK.COM, SLYDIAL.COM, AND KALL8.COM

- **MajicJack.com** is a very inexpensive device that your phone plugs into and then into the USB port of your computer, using VOIP. It works incredibly well, has your choice of phone numbers throughout the USA, voicemail, customizable greetings and call forwarding features (except to a toll-free number, which would be an added bonus for our profession). The Caller-ID shows ‘Unknown’ and your assigned number. Many people do not answer ‘unknown number’ or ‘blocked’ calls. Although this will not forward to a toll-free number, I have had some luck with the voicemail greeting that says ‘We are experiencing technical issues. Please hang-up and try your call again. You may also call our customer service department at [trapline number]’. This usually entices them to call your trapline.

- **SlyDial.com** is a free service that connects your call (from any phone) directly to a cell phone voicemail service. This bypasses the possibility of the subject answering if you do not want them to. Be forewarned that although most calls will not even ring to the mobile phone, but some will ring once and show your Caller-ID. To be safe, use MagicJack or a calling card feature to complete this call. The idea here is: 1. listen to the voicemail greeting and see who owns the cell phone; and 2. entice a call back from your subject but from a different phone by blocking the ability to call from the cell phone [see Kall8]. It is also handy if you want to simply leave someone a message, but not talk to them – such as a meeting reminder.

- **Kall8.com** is my personal choice for a customizable trapline for a small office. The basic service is a few dollars per month. This includes do-it-yourself programming of your account online – voicemail, fax receiving, ring-to destination number, call blocking, etc. For about \$10 per month you can add automatic call recording; check your state statutes for use and legalities. This feature starts as soon as they complete dialing the call and before it is answered. You will be amazed at what people will say before you answer the call (let it ring 2-3 times).

After activating the service you should first decide if you want to block calls from payphones. There is a one-time charge for this. In my opinion calls from payphones are useless (have you found one lately?) and you are charged a fee for each call from a payphone. Next decide the ring-to, or destination, number for the call. You can also choose voicemail and record a custom greeting. The last necessary steps are to provide your email for call reports and recordings, as well as activate the automatic name and address record. This service provides the published Caller-ID or subscriber data for each call to the trapline. From here you are ready to begin.

Each time your toll-free number is called you will receive an email(s) that will include the call date and time, length, call from number and (if opted) the name and address of the subscriber. If you have opted for call recording you will receive a separate email of that recording. This information is also stored real-time with your Kall8 account.

After receiving and identifying your calls, what do you do to prevent more calls? Simply login to your account and block that number. You can also block by state, area code, or area code and prefix. This is particularly handy to force your subject to call from a number that is different from the one you already know (see ‘Cell Phones’ below). You may add as many numbers and uses to your account as you need. You may also disconnect any number. One of the most useful tools of Kall8, and the commercial trapline companies, are ‘blindlines’. With the commercial companies you can choose from a variety of options that include spoofed names and numbers, such as ‘Government’ or ‘Customer Service’. With Kall8 you do not have that benefit. Kall8 is simply a calling card that you use to make a call, which I use to disguise where I am calling from. Make the call using your toll-free account and the receiving Caller-ID shows your choice of either your ring-to number or your toll-free number. I use my toll-free number to call a subject (including via Slydial). This works to receive a call back even when I cannot leave a message (some people still do not have answering machines or voicemail); hopefully they have Caller-ID or use *69 and are curious who called them. We are all curious by human nature.

This article is an updated section from Dean Beers’ book, ‘Professional Locate Investigations,’ and is one of the most popular subjects on which he receives requests for advice.

Dean A. Beers is the owner and Senior Legal Investigator of Forensic Investigators of Colorado, LLC, based in LaPorte, Colorado. He has been a legal investigator since 1987 with extensive experience in skip tracing. He left the private sector from 2005 to 2008 to work as Deputy Coroner / Certified Medicolegal Death Investigator for the Larimer County Medical Examiner's Office. He returned to the private sector in late 2008 and now focuses primarily on the legal investigations of Personal Injury, Negligence and Death, as well as Criminal Defense. His wife, Karen, handles agency administrative matters and is also an Associate Legal Investigator. Please visit the agency website for detailed information at www.Forensic-Investigators.com^[1]. After 'retiring' from the private sector, he completed his book 'Professional Locate Investigations'.

Dean has extensive training, experience, skill sets and knowledge in Personal Injury, Negligence and Death, and all contributing causations. Related areas include motor vehicle collisions, workplace incidents, elder abuse, child abuse, slip and fall, premises liability, as well as related evidence collection and analysis. In addition, he continues to provide detailed Criminal Defense investigations, now with the benefit of POST certification and extensive familiarity with the local law enforcement community and judiciary.

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Investigative Telephonics and Traplines- Part 2

Posted By Dean A. Beers, CLI on May 17, 2009

Legally using telephonic information to find your skips and determine useful information.

DELIVERY NOTICES AND DELIVERY POSTCARDS

I developed this idea several years ago to increase my success rate with process serving. It was an incredible concept that never failed me, not one time. With the concept of the traplines and calling cards, I developed the use of delivery notices. I used them to determine non-published numbers, times when the subject would be home, verifying they were home when I was attempting service, or that they possibly moved.

The tools are: pre-printed door hangers or peel-and-stick notices (that easily peel off), and your toll-free number. The message is simply that you attempted to deliver a package, requiring a signature, and to please call the delivery dispatch center. I use a custom number that has the business acronym (i.e. US Rapid Delivery – 877-123-USRD). This is not the number I use, but you can find one by searching Kall8 for a usable acronym and number.

The premise is simple – if there is uncertainty that a subject is at the address or I need verification, a notice is left and the caller will either confirm it, indicate the subject is not a resident, or sometimes offer a new address and/or telephone number. For other situations, such as PO Boxes, I use a delivery notice postcard and the same premise. The key to effective trapline use is the message left to entice a return telephone call – greed and messages that get immediate attention work best, and I have had a success rate of better than 80% using the postcards. I also reserve these for cases that have me stuck or my investigation leads me to believe this is the best method to determine or verify an address. This is because once used, it may not work again and I have had numerous occasions requiring me to find a subject two or even three times.

CELL PHONES

Cell phones are much like non-published numbers – we know the information exists, but how do we get it. As cell phones are gradually replacing traditional landline service for our voice communication needs, these names and numbers are becoming more and more frequent in common databases. Start with entering the number into various search engines and then databases. Two of the best resources for this are www.reachdirect.com and www.telequery.net; the latter allows you to use wild card searching. Telequery.net also has a 'Caller-ID' function that will tell you the information as it appears on the Caller-ID but is often not in other data records. This is the same information that is presented when a number is trapped on a toll-free service. Credit headers and other resources tend to be the next steps to acquiring both cell phone and non-published data.

Using a trapline to determine related information about a cell phone user is next. First you will need to setup a few things. Your trapline and use the 'blocking' feature to block payphones and the cell phone number of the subscriber. I broaden this with the cell phone prefix (i.e. if my target phone is 123-555-1234, I block 123-555) – this prevents the target from using their cell phone (or any cell phone with that prefix) from calling you back on the trapline number. You will want blocked numbers to go directly to voicemail and unblocked numbers to go to a different destination phone number (I recommend MagicJack – you can answer that or let it go to a different voicemail). Next change your trapline voicemail greeting to something like 'We are experiencing technical difficulties – please hang up and try your call again. If you continue to experience this problem please try from a different phone to assist us in isolating the problem'; using a female voice is best). This will force the caller to use a different phone, hopefully a traditional landline that is their residence phone, employer phone or possibly a neighbor.

Once you have this information all it takes is a little bit more work to develop your target's location. But first you need to persuade the target into calling your trapline. Sometimes no message is best – just a name and number, depending on your specific situation. The above delivery notices and postcards work wonderfully. New generation communication has given other unique opportunities, as detailed below.

VOICEMAIL, TEXT MESSAGES, EMAIL, PAGERS AND WEB PAGES

All of these are simply methods of communication. If you know the cell phone number, use SlyDial to bypass calling the person and be sent directly to their voicemail. You will want to use the calling card feature of Kall8 in case they have a feature that tells them the number that left the message. This serves two purposes – it protects your identity and encourages them to call the trapline number back out of curiosity. Remember, all you want is a call back to trap the new number – nothing more is necessary (but more is helpful). You can also use the paging feature of cell phone voicemail ('to page this person press '#'). Use the SlyDial method above and enter your trapline number setup to reject calls from the cell phone.

Text messaging is nothing more than using the voicemail and pager methods, except you want to remain anonymous. Yahoo mail has a unique feature to send a text message to any cell phone; it is as anonymous as your Yahoo email address. This is because they send two messages – the intended message and a special message that tells the recipient that Yahoo user 'your Yahoo username' is trying to send you a text message. Another somewhat anonymous web based text messaging is www.textyourbuddy.com. You will need to enter an email address and the message. Your delivered message will show the email address you entered and 'sent from textyourbuddy.com'. It is not so bad to have an email address appear, as long as it is a generic and anonymous email address. They may be enticed to send an email to you (less than infrequent in my experience) – giving you their IP address (at least their general location) and their email address. You can then use various email tracing methods to develop additional information. Likewise, if you have an email address but nothing else, use the same message delivery theories already outlined to craft an anonymous and enticing email message for them to call your trapline. These theories can also be used for persons that have webpages and contact forms. Finally, you can setup your own webpage and contact form enticing them to contact you or call your trapline.

CALLING CARDS

Identical to calling cards you purchase; however, these are pre-paid by you and mailed to the subject. These are only available from the commercial providers.

The specialized calling cards are essentially the same as the trapline. This is especially useful when all you have is the target's mail drop address or the address of a relative. The commercial company will send a free calling card in a marketing package, hoping your subject will call someone or be called by the relative. The uses of these are as vast as your imagination. With the extensive use of cell phones and no associated long distance charges, calling card use is rapidly declining.

As with all calling cards, you will be able to see the date, time and telephone numbers called from and to; and just as with the trapline, not just once a month – but virtually any time it is used and in the same notification manners. Due to the cost, in the past I have used these only on the subjects that are sure to bite and have avoided any other trick I could think of. The costs can be \$25- \$75.

COMBINING THESE RESOURCES

Each of the above services have unique stand alone uses – but when combined create powerful investigative tools. The uses of these services are really up to the legal and creative imagination. Calling a cell phone with Slydial and leaving an enticing message with a toll-free number is just the same as sending an email, text message or other communication – get your number to the subject and get them to call you back. Be creative and think like your subject. What would prevent them from calling you? What messages, letters, emails or other communications have you received that enticed you to call a number? The answers to these questions are the beginning to the answers of where your skip is hiding, living and working. All of these methods have proven beneficial to me – some more so than others. This article is generally written from the most successful methods to the least. It is important to practice safe, legal, and common sense investigative strategies. DO NOT use any pretext or form of communication that may jeopardize your case, your client, or your profession. If you are not permitted to contact a subject (i.e. an opposing party represented by an attorney) you cannot use these methods.

Feel free to share your thoughts and ideas with me and your fellow investigators.

This article is an updated section from Dean Beers' book, 'Professional Locate Investigations;' and is one of the most popular subjects on which he receives requests for advice.

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