

**FORENSIC LITIGATION CONSULTING:**

# Digital footprints and forensic investigations

**Ever-increasing reliance on technology, in all its forms, is both good news and bad news for fraud investigators. The exponential growth in the digital footprint created by an individual navigating life presents an ocean of data that can provide crucial evidence in an investigation. Acquiring, processing and analysing that data, however, can be daunting.**

Irrespective of how technologically advanced, creative or devious a fraudster is, every action leaves a digital footprint. Humans contribute to their digital footprint almost every waking moment, and often even while they are asleep. From traditional sources of information such as text messages, emails and online search history to information shared with apps on our mobile devices and smart watches, like sleep patterns, geolocations and activities, almost everything we do contributes to our digital footprint. There is enormous value in this digital footprint – to marketers, scammers and investigators alike. It is particularly valuable in facilitating more efficient and accurate investigation of fraud, and a higher level of confidence in convicting wrongdoers. Acquiring, analysing and interpreting electronic evidence when investigating fraud is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Cases that do not require the collection and analysis of some form of electronic evidence, whether structured or unstructured, are few and far between.

## An ocean of data:

The digital trail left when a person posts on, or even views, various social media platforms allows investigators to connect the dots, something not possible only a few years ago. People are generally over-sharers of information on social media platforms, or they share information and media that contains data points not immediately obvious to the user. For example, sharing their geolocation or recent activities is common on sites like Facebook, but the metadata available in posted content on certain social media platforms, such as timestamps and geolocations in photos, provides additional clues to the investigator. Additionally, reviewing activities, posts and timelines of friends or connected individuals on social media platforms can give insight into a person's relationships, whereabouts and activities at a specific time.

Since the launch of the smartphone it has become common for these phones to use their sensors to acquire and store extensive data about the user. Similarly, smart watches put sensors on our bodies, and enable them to record our location and health vital statistics in real time.

Data acquired from card swipes (bank cards, loyalty cards or even gym access cards), tweets or logins to online sites can also all provide ancillary information to support or disprove a hypothesis.

The Internet of Things (IoT) has seen a proliferation of sensors embedded into our homes and cars. Devices using platforms such as Amazon's Alexa or Google's Assistant are treasure troves of data about what music we listen to, what questions we ask and when we wake up. All this data is stored somewhere. These devices can surreptitiously turn on recording devices (video or audio) and transmit data to be stored and analysed on the other side of the world.

## The challenge and opportunity for investigators is enormous:

Considering the often personal and always transient nature of digital evidence, investigators need to ensure:

1. Preservation of the data presented in a person's digital footprint, especially when it is identified on an online source. Because this data can often be altered or manipulated by the user, a form of recording should be used when viewing user accounts on these platforms.
2. Adhering to and following the rules and regulations governing electronic evidence, data privacy and personal information which is constantly evolving with technological advancements. It is essential that an investigator stays abreast of these changes.
3. They follow the evidence acquisition and preservation process properly and within the relevant legal boundaries when collating digital evidence.

Any investigation which requires an investigator to identify, acquire and analyse volumes of structured and unstructured data from a multitude of data sources demands a broad range of skills, experience and tools in order to conduct a comprehensive investigation. The derived insights and value, however, can be highly beneficial to an investigator.

Our professionals at FTI Consulting can help organisations solve their most complex investigations through the collection and analysis of volumes of data from a variety of sources, across multiple jurisdictions and time zones.

### For more information contact



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### About FTI Consulting

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