

# CUTTING THROUGH THE NOISE:

## How Private Investigators Can Master Open-Source Data in the Age of Misinformation



My Experience with  
AI Creation of a  
PI Caricature -  
Lessons Learned

The Growing Threat of  
AI to Family Law

The Importance of Avoiding  
Investigative Bias

And SO MUCH  
MORE!

# DEPARTMENTS

## BOOK SPOTLIGHT

- 18** FORENSIC DATA COLLECTIONS 2.0: THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION OF TRUSTED DIGITAL CONTENT  
By Robert Fried

## ASSOCIATION PROFILE

- 19** NEW HAMPSHIRE LEAGUE OF INVESTIGATORS

## PI 101

- 20** DEVELOPING YOUR INTERVIEW STRATEGY (PART I)  
By Joe Koenig
- 22** THE CRIMINAL DEFENSE INVESTIGATOR'S STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CONDUCTING POST-CONVICTION RELIEF APPEAL INVESTIGATIONS, PART II  
By Malik Mubashshir

## BUSINESS

- 24** CULTIVATING STRONG CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS FOR SUSTAINED SUCCESS  
By Amber Schroader

## BUSINESS-TAX

- 26** DEALING WITH TROUBLED CLIENTS AND CUSTOMERS  
By Mark E. Battersby

## SOCIAL MEDIA

- 28** IMAGE OSINT TOOLS - HOW AI IS CHANGING THE SCENE  
By Kathy Doering

## PI HISTORY

- 31** CICERO'S FIRST WIN  
By Daniel Demers
- 32** GHOSTS IN THE RAIN, SIGNALS IN THE CLOUD: HOW INVESTIGATIONS HAVE EVOLVED ACROSS TWO ERAS  
By Brad Trew

## IMPACT ANALYSIS

- 34** THE ROLE OF THE PI IN CRASH INVESTIGATIONS  
By Daniel Jones

## VERACITY FILES

- 36** LEVERAGING OSINT TO BUILD AN INTERVIEW STRATEGY  
By Jody O'Guinn

## ALL THINGS SURVEILLANCE

- 40** WEATHER OR NOT  
By Eric DeVan

## CYBERSLEUTHING

- 42** WRITING IS MY PASSION, AND IT'S A WIN-WIN  
By Robert B. Fried
- 44** THE VACUUM THAT KNEW TOO MUCH: 7,000 ROBOT VACUUM SPIES IN OUR HOMES!  
By Christopher Salgado

## PI PERSPECTIVES

- 46** LEVERAGING GOVERNMENTAL INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGIES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR  
By John Dale Hartman

## TSCM

- 48** CORPORATE ESPIONAGE TACTICS TARGETING HIGH-NET-WORTH INDIVIDUALS AND EXECUTIVES: THE PI'S ROLE IN COUNTER-SURVEILLANCE  
By Tim O'Rourke

## THE PI AND FUGITIVE RECOVERY

- 50** BALANCING JUSTICE AND SECURITY: THE ROLE OF BAIL ENFORCEMENT AND PRIVATE INVESTIGATION IN AN ERA OF REFORM  
By Patrick Collis

## EXECUTIVE PROTECTION

- 52** BRIDGING THE GAP: WHY EVERY PROTECTION AGENT SHOULD THINK LIKE AN INVESTIGATOR  
By R. Preston Hocker

## PROCESS SERVING

- 54** PRETEXTING IN PROCESS SERVING AND SEMI-UNDER COVER FIELD WORK  
By Lindon Lilly

## PROCESS SERVING

- 56** A LITTLE R-E-S-P-E-C-T, WHAT IT CAN MEAN FOR A SERVICE  
By Kevin Toal

## MARKETING

- 58** YOUR SILENCE IS COSTING YOU CLIENTS  
By Catherine Flowers

## FINANCIAL

- 60** MODERNIZING SUBPOENA LANGUAGE AND PROCESS FOR THE DIGITAL ASSET ERA  
By Rodney Gagnon

## NCISS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

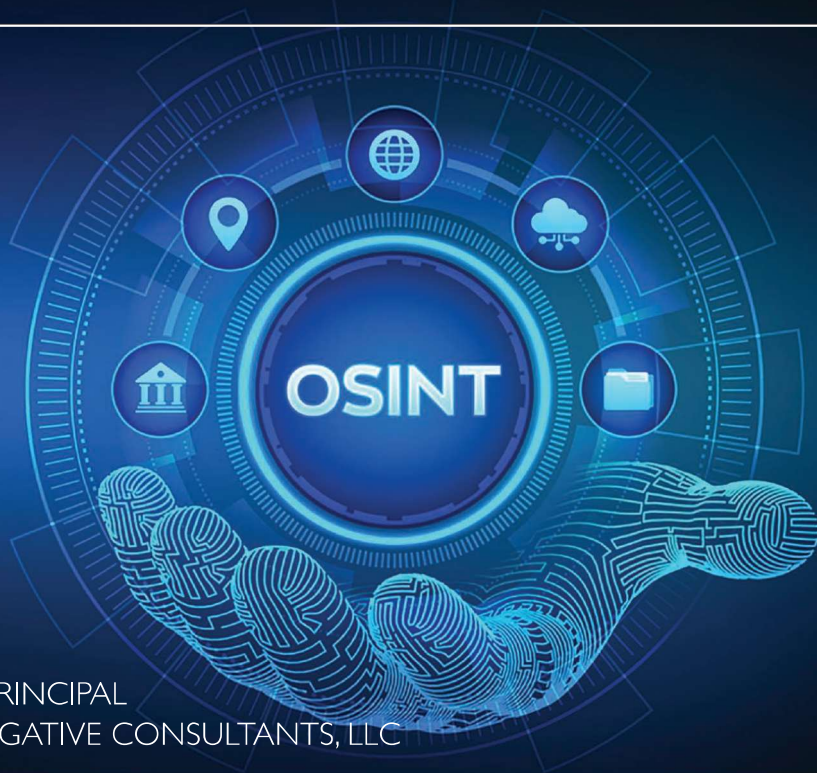
- 67** NCISS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE  
By Rich Robertson

## IN EVERY ISSUE

Public Records Update .....	59
Discover NALI.....	63-65
PI Resources.....	68-69
PI Seminars & Conference Calendar .....	71

# Leveraging OSINT to Build an Interview Strategy

BY **JODY O'GUINN**, CEO AND PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR CALABASH INVESTIGATIVE CONSULTANTS, LLC



## INTRODUCTION:

### Preparation Determines Outcome

In professional private investigations, the interview is rarely just a conversation. It is a disciplined fact-development process designed to clarify events, assess credibility, evaluate motive, and preserve evidence. Whether conducted in support of civil litigation, corporate compliance reviews, internal misconduct investigations, or criminal defense strategy, interviews are most effective when structured rather than improvised.

Throughout my career, I have consistently found that the most successful interviews begin long before the subject enters the room. The strategic integration of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) into pre-interview planning transforms questioning from reactive inquiry into purposeful engagement. In today's digital environment, where individuals and organizations leave extensive public footprints, ignoring open-source intelligence is not merely inefficient; it is strategically limiting.

This article explores how OSINT, when lawfully collected and properly analyzed, serves as the foundation for building a deliberate, ethically sound interview strategy.

### Understanding OSINT in the Investigative Context

Open-Source Intelligence refers to information that is legally obtained from publicly accessible sources. These sources include court records, corporate registrations, licensing boards, regulatory filings, news archives, academic publications, property records, geospatial platforms, and publicly available social media content. While the term "OSINT" may suggest technological complexity, its value lies not in novelty but in disciplined application.

OSINT is not treated as casual online searching. It is a structured process of collecting, verifying, organizing, and preserving information in a manner that supports investigative objectives. The distinction is critical. Gathering information without a strategy leads to overload. Gathering information with a defined interview goal in mind produces focus.

The purpose of OSINT in interview preparation is not to accumulate trivia. It is to develop clarity around identity, chronology, motive, associations, and documented behavior patterns. This clarity shapes every stage of the interview.

### Identity Confirmation and Background Context

Before meaningful questioning can occur, investigators must confirm the subject's identity. Identity confirmation may seem elementary, yet discrepancies in names, aliases, prior legal identities, business affiliations, or address history can affect both strategy and credibility assessment.

Public records frequently reveal details that go beyond self-reported biographies. Corporate filings may show ownership interests not disclosed in resumes. Licensing agencies may identify disciplinary histories. Court dockets can reveal litigation patterns. These elements do not prove wrongdoing, but they provide contextual insight.

When investigators understand how a subject has presented themselves publicly, professionally, financially, and legally, they enter the interview with a clearer perspective. This preparation fosters more precise questioning and reduces the likelihood of being misled by incomplete narratives.

### Timeline Reconstruction as Strategic Framework

Chronology remains one of the most powerful tools in structured interviewing. People recall events in sequences. When an investigator has already reconstructed a timeline using public records and open-source materials, the interview gains structural integrity.

As investigators, we should frequently build pre-interview timelines that incorporate employment transitions, business formations, regulatory events, public announcements, litigation filings, and property transactions. These data points provide anchors for questioning.

Chronological questioning allows the subject to commit to a sequence of events in their own words. Once committed, that narrative can be compared to verified data. Inconsistencies emerge not through confrontation but through juxtaposition. This method promotes fairness while enhancing clarity.

A timeline-based approach also prevents interviews from getting bogged down in the weeds. It disciplines both the interviewer and the subject to remain focused on relevant periods. Rather than asking broadly what happened, the investigator can ask what occurred during specific time windows, supported by documentation.

## Identifying Motivational Themes Through OSINT

Facts describe behavior, but themes explain behavior. OSINT often reveals contextual stressors or influences that may have shaped decisions. Financial pressure, as indicated by bankruptcy filings or foreclosure records, may suggest economic strain. Repeated disputes reflected in the litigation history may indicate conflict patterns. Regulatory sanctions may reveal reputational vulnerability.

These thematic insights inform how questions are framed. An accusatory approach often triggers defensiveness, while a contextual approach encourages explanation. When an investigator understands potential pressure points, they can inquire about decision-making under stress rather than immediately alleging misconduct.

For example, in a procurement investigation, public records showing a family member's recent business formation may inform questions about vendor selection processes. The objective is not to imply guilt but to allow the subject to address documented realities within a structured framework.

Thematic preparation strengthens both neutrality and effectiveness. It enables the investigator to explore motive without appearing speculative.

## Building Rapport Through Informed Engagement

Rapport is frequently misunderstood as superficial friendliness. In investigative practice, rapport is grounded in credibility and respect. Subjects respond differently when they perceive the interviewer as knowledgeable and professional.

OSINT helps identify authentic rapport anchors. Professional achievements, certifications, public service roles, or industry contributions that appear in open records can serve as neutral starting points. Referencing legitimate accomplishments demonstrates preparation without intrusion.

However, measured discretion is crucial. Overly detailed references to personal or obscure online content can undermine trust. As investigators, we should emphasize balance, demonstrating awareness without appearing invasive. When subjects perceive that the investigator is both informed and fair, defensiveness often decreases.

Preparedness also shapes psychological dynamics. Individuals are less inclined to fabricate elaborate stories when they believe the interviewer has independently verified background information. This subtle awareness can reduce exaggeration and improve candor.

## Strategic Sequencing and Controlled Disclosure

One of the most consequential components of interview strategy involves determining when to disclose known information. OSINT-based preparation offers options. The investigator may allow the subject to provide an uninterrupted narrative before introducing documentation. Alternatively, specific data points may be used to narrow questioning at calculated moments.

Premature confrontation can entrench denial. Conversely, withholding relevant information for too long may limit opportunities for clarification. Strategic sequencing requires thoughtful planning. Interview plans should include progressive phases: open narrative, targeted clarification, thematic exploration, and selective introduction of documents.

Selective disclosure of publicly verified information can test consistency. If a subject denies involvement during a time period that coincides with documented business activity or public communications, the discrepancy can be examined calmly and methodically. The tone remains professional. The purpose remains clarification.

Controlled disclosure is not designed for theatrics. It is designed to preserve interview integrity while maximizing the development of truth.

## Credibility Assessment in a Digital Age

Credibility evaluation is rarely based on a single contradiction. It is measured through patterns of alignment or divergence between narrative and verified information. OSINT enhances this evaluation by providing objective reference points.

When a subject's account corresponds with documented timelines and publicly verifiable data, credibility strengthens. When inconsistencies appear, investigators must evaluate their materiality. Memory limitations, misunderstandings, and innocent omissions differ significantly from intentional deception.

In modern investigations, digital footprints often precede interviews. Social media posts, archived web content, or public statements may conflict with present assertions. Investigators must approach such discrepancies with caution and context. Online personas can be curated or aspirational; not every exaggeration signals misconduct.

The investigator's role is not to judge lifestyle or self-presentation. It is to identify factual inconsistencies that bear directly on the matter under review.

## Corporate and Litigation Applications

In corporate settings, OSINT-based interview strategy frequently supports internal compliance investigations, fraud inquiries, and conflict-of-interest reviews. Vendor ownership records, public corporate registrations, and regulatory disclosures often reveal relationships that warrant clarification. Entering interviews with documented affiliations allows questions to be framed with specificity and neutrality.

In litigation support contexts, attorneys rely on investigators to assess the strength and vulnerability of witnesses. Publicly available litigation histories, prior sworn statements, and professional representations may signal risks of impeachment. By integrating these data points into interview preparation, investigators help legal teams anticipate strategic challenges.

For example, if a claimant publicly asserts professional credentials not supported by licensing databases, the discrepancy can be explored privately during preparation rather than exposed unexpectedly in court. Early identification of vulnerabilities preserves strategic control.

## Ethical Boundaries and Legal Compliance

The expanding accessibility of information does not diminish ethical responsibility. Investigators must ensure that OSINT collection respects privacy boundaries and complies with applicable federal, state, and industry regulations. Public availability does not authorize deception, misrepresentation, or circumvention of access controls.

Verification is equally essential. Online information can be altered or deleted. Investigators should preserve relevant findings with documented access dates and source identifiers. Screenshots and archival verification protect evidentiary integrity.

Bias prevention is another ethical imperative. Investigators must resist the temptation to allow preliminary research to shape rigid conclusions. OSINT should inform inquiry, not dictate outcome. Interviews remain opportunities for explanation and clarification, not confirmation of presumption.

## Managing Information Volume and Analytical Discipline

One risk of OSINT-driven preparation is information overload. The modern digital landscape can produce more data than is strategically useful. Effective investigators filter information based on relevance to interview objectives.

As investigators, we must emphasize analytical discipline. Background research is organized into structured categories: identity, chronology, professional affiliations, financial indicators, litigation exposure, and

relational mapping. This categorization prevents distraction and supports focused questioning.

The goal is not to demonstrate how much information was gathered. The goal is to use only what strengthens clarity, neutrality, and efficiency during the interview.

### Integrating OSINT into Formal Interview Planning

Interview preparation should culminate in a structured plan. This plan may include confirmed data points, anticipated areas of inconsistency, chronological anchors, thematic stress indicators, and a planned disclosure strategy. By converting research into a framework, investigators avoid improvisation under pressure.

A written plan also supports accountability. It demonstrates that the questioning conducted followed a deliberate structure rather than reactive intuition. For corporate and legal clients, such documentation reinforces professionalism and defensibility.

Preparation reduces uncertainty. When investigators enter the interview room with disciplined structure informed by verified open-source intelligence, they retain composure even when narratives shift unexpectedly.

### Human Engagement Remains Central

While OSINT enhances preparation, it does not replace interpersonal skills. Interviews remain human interactions requiring empathy, neutrality, and composure. Tone, body language, pacing, and listening skills remain essential.

Digital research provides context. Dialogue reveals nuance. Utilizing OSINT is a preparatory tool that sharpens, not substitutes for, professional interview methodology. The most effective interviews integrate informed questioning with measured listening. When subjects perceive fairness combined with competence, the likelihood of meaningful disclosure increases.

### Conclusion: Preparedness as a Professional Standard

In a world where individuals and organizations leave expansive digital footprints, structured OSINT preparation has become an essential element of professional investigative practice. Interviews conducted without contextual awareness risk inefficiency and missed opportunities.

Leveraging OSINT to build an interview strategy allows investigators to reconstruct timelines, identify motivational themes, evaluate credibility, and structure disclosure with intentional precision. When done ethically and lawfully, this preparation enhances accuracy without compromising fairness.

Ultimately, preparation reflects respect for the facts, for the client, and for the integrity of the investigative process itself. An interview should never begin with guesswork. It should begin with informed clarity.

In the end, the objective is not confrontation. It is illumination. And illumination begins with preparation. **PI**



*Jody O'Guinn is a retired police chief with 34 years of law enforcement leadership, serving as Deputy Chief in Alton and Chief of Police in Carbondale and Freeman Spur, Illinois. A veteran SWAT and Regional WMD SRT Commander, he also held key roles with the DEA and MEGSI narcotics task forces. He is a certified Workplace Violence Threat Specialist and an Active Shooter Response Instructor. A graduate of the FBI National Academy and LEEDS program at Quantico, he holds an MPA from Southern Illinois University. He pioneered the world's first board-certified cryptocurrency forensic investigator course and now serves as the Director of Law Enforcement Operations at Baker Group International.*

**When the piece is missing – Calabash finds it**

**CALABASH**  
INVESTIGATIVE CONSULTANTS, LLC

GEORGIA LICENSED – PDC002961/PDE052357

jog@calabashpi.com

404.772.2746