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Data Points to Truth

A Digitial Forensics AI Portal built by Robert B. Fried

ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

- Every Investigator Event: One Global Calendar
- Investigating Human Trafficking: A Practical Field Approach for Private Investigators
- Human Trafficking, Missing Persons or Runaway: It's All in the Clues
- The WAPI Women's Collective: Celebrating Female Leadership in a Changing Investigative Profession
- The Destructive Consequences of Classifying a Case Too Early: How a Private Investigator Can Help

Connecting the Dots...

NICOLE CUSANELLI, M.A.

As investigators, we all know the feeling of the late-night call or the urgent client email that requires an immediate response. In many ways, we operate as "digital firefighters," constantly ready to react to high-stakes situations at all hours of the day. But when quick, critical decisions need to be made in the field, where do you turn for immediate, trusted guidance?

Our cover story for this issue features an industry pioneer who asked that very question and built the answer. We are thrilled to spotlight Robert B. Fried, Executive Vice President of Forensics & Chief Investigative Officer at Page One, Inc., and his groundbreaking philosophy: "*Data Points to Truth*."

For years, Rob has been a dedicated contributor to *PI Magazine* through the popular Cybersleuthing department. As an accomplished expert with decades of experience performing data collections and forensic investigations of electronic evidence, his background is exceptional.

In this issue, we dive into his incredible new launch: forensics.expert This is the world's first free, AI-powered digital forensics knowledge portal, tightly constrained to a knowledge base built directly on Rob's field-tested methodologies and his highly regarded books, *Forensic Data Collections 2.0: A Selection of Trusted Digital Forensics Content* and *Forensic Data Collections 2.0: The Guide for Defensible & Efficient Processes.* forensics.expert is Rob's personal contribution to the field, financially and by way of his knowledge and time. We hope you try it out and add it to your arsenal of investigative tools.

Beyond our digital forensics cover story, this issue brings you a powerful lineup of features designed to elevate your field practice and expand your industry networks. We introduce a vital master calendar to keep you connected to every major global investigator gathering and networking event. In the field, we tackle high-stakes operations with two critical, sensitive guides on investigating human trafficking, missing persons, and runaways by tracking essential clues. We also take pride in celebrating the evolving roles and vital contributions of female leadership through a special profile on the WAPI Women's Collective. Finally, we look at critical investigative strategy with a deep-dive analysis on the destructive consequences of classifying a case too early, reminding us all why objective, open-minded analysis remains paramount from day one.

Of course, as Rob wisely reminds us, whether dealing with a complex digital puzzle or a boots-on-the-ground field investigation, our approach must always be to "trust, but verify." When individual points of data and field clues are properly connected, they inevitably lead to the truth.

We hope the insights, methodologies, and tools featured across all of these articles empower you to connect those dots with greater speed, confidence, and success in conducting investigations than ever before.

Finally, as we look ahead, don't forget that July 24th is National Private Investigator Day! Our History department writer Daniel Demers has explored this history in a fantastic article about Eugéne-François Vidoq: The First Modern Private Investigator. Take a few moments this month to recognize your colleagues, celebrate the rich history of our profession, and honor the vital work you all perform daily to bring truth to light, as we also commemorate the 250 anniversary of our nation's founding.

Nicole Cusanelli

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FEATURES

forensics.expert

A Free AI-Powered Digital Forensics Knowledge Portal

BY **ROBERT B. FRIED,** EVP OF FORENSICS & CHIEF INVESTIGATIVE OFFICER, PAGE ONE, INC

A digital forensics practitioner must always stay ready when a client emails or makes a call in need. Most of the time, we respond to situations as they happen, instead of anticipating them. We must be ready to respond, sometimes at short notice, and at all hours of the day. I equate my job to that of a "digital" firefighter.

EXPERTISE SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE

Over the years, technology has advanced, and my career has progressed into leadership roles. Throughout these shifts, my passion for digital forensics has continued to grow. I still get an adrenaline rush when someone reaches out to me for support. However, beyond my profession, I am a father, husband, son, brother, and uncle; I have learned the importance of a healthy work-life balance.

Since 2020, I have written consistently about digital forensics and investigations to share my knowledge with others. I strongly believe expertise should be accessible. Having been in the industry for as long as I have, I frequently field similar questions: How do I complete a chain of custody form? How do you collect only text messages from a specific period? Although I have published content that answers these questions and more, the individual asking the question may not have access to my books, lectures, and presentations. This is especially an issue in high-stakes moments when quick decisions are necessary – there may not be time to read a book or even pick up the phone. So, I thought, "There has to be a better way!"

In recent years, AI models have become publicly available and increasingly part of our daily lives, changing how we find and trust information. One night, just as I was about to go to sleep, I checked my phone and saw an urgent message from a client, asking how to collect data from a webmail account in a defensible manner. Because the request was time-sensitive, I responded immediately; the attorney on the other end was relying on my team for guidance. But I wondered: what if I had not seen the message? In that moment, I realized there had to be a better way to make my content accessible – using AI as the delivery mechanism while keeping the knowledge itself, my own. As more people began turning to AI, I saw an opportunity to bring that idea to life. That is why I built the world's first AI-powered digital forensics knowledge portal.

BUILT ON MY PUBLISHED METHODOLOGY

Forensics.Expert (accessible via a web browser: https://forensics.expert/) is a free portal built on the digital forensics methodologies published in my five books, and other content that I have generated. The system prompt constrains the model to a knowledge base covering important topics, including computers, mobile devices, cloud storage, email evidence, network file shares, databases, social media, and ephemeral data; these guardrails reduce the probability of a harmful error. I designed the portal to make foundational digital forensics knowledge more accessible to others who regularly work with digital forensics practitioners, such as attorneys, investigators, compliance officers, and human resources professionals.

IT IS THE STARTING POINT – NOT THE FINISH LINE

Whether it be an attorney who is preparing for a deposition and needs to know the difference between a full forensic image or a targeted collection, or an investigator in the field who may need a quick answer about a forensic collection of a mobile device, querying Forensics.Expert is a viable option – a starting point. It can also allow others to better engage with digital forensics practitioners by helping them ask better questions, understand the answers they receive, and make more informed decisions. Users can easily copy, share, and save answers to a PDF document.

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR AN EXPERT

It is critical to understand that the portal is not a substitute for retaining a digital forensics practitioner. Digital forensics is a discipline that is based on defensible methodologies. Each consultant-grade answer the portal provides has a disclaimer: "For informational & educational purposes only. Always consult with a qualified professional before taking action." You cannot get defensible forensics from a website; however, Forensics.Expert can provide you with knowledge to know when something may be wrong. I have previously written about AI and digital forensics. My view of any tool is straightforward: trust, but verify. Because AI is non-deterministic, it can be wrong.

CONTRIBUTING WITH IMPACT

Developing Forensics.Expert has been a rewarding experience. When I bought the domain a few years ago, I never imagined it would become the home of an AI-powered knowledge portal. As I create new digital forensics content, I add it to the knowledge base. Although the site has only been live for a short time, the questions users ask have already been telling. They have revealed where knowledge gaps are and have helped me with ideas for generating new content.

I remain committed to sharing my knowledge with others, which is why Forensics.Expert will remain free. Attorneys who understand digital forensics can better advocate for their clients, and investigators who know how to identify relevant data close cases faster. The opportunity to make that kind of impact drives me to keep contributing to the fields I love, and Forensics.Expert is a vehicle for accomplishing that.

DATA POINTS TO TRUTH

When you visit the Forensics.Expert site, a tagline appears front and center: "Data Points to Truth." To me, it is not just a phrase; it is part of my philosophy, that is consistent with similar phrases, "Data or it didn't happen" and "No data, no evidence." Having knowledge is important, but understanding is paramount. Data is becoming more voluminous and complex. What we know today may not hold true tomorrow. Data by itself can only tell so much; what matters most is how it can be used:

- Attorneys use data to defend their clients;
- Investigators use data to establish a timeline of events;
- Compliance officers use data to identify and mitigate risk;
- Human resources professionals use data to protect organizations and their employees.

When points of data are connected, they lead to the truth. **PI**

Robert B. Fried is an accomplished expert with decades of experience performing data collections and forensic investigations of electronic evidence. He attained a BS and MS in Forensic Science from the University of New Haven. He holds and actively maintains industry certifications and is a licensed PI in Michigan, New York, and South Carolina. Robert serves on the Board of Advisors for the Masters in Investigations program at the University of New Haven, the Global Advisory Board for EC-Council's CHFI certification and is a Fellow at 1he Henry C Lee Institute of Forensic Science at the University of New Haven. He is the author of the books: Forensic Data Collections 2.0: A Selection of Trusted Digital Forensics Content *and* Forensic Data Collections 2.0: The Guide for Defensible & Efficient Processes.