

the photo and positioned myself to match the same perspective on the ground.

Based on the searches done, we were able to determine which building, floor and unit number the subject resided in.

My next article will explore geo-location based searches using various social media platforms.

About Brad Trew:

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Skiptracing

By Óscar Rosa

Nowadays, skiptracing reports are basic to anyone in need of information about private individuals and companies. Private investigators play a main role against the usual channels of commercial information by providing worthy, legal and accurate material, crucial for any company interests.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, skiptracing is a service demanded to private investigators worldwide. Financial institutions, insurance companies, law firms, collection agencies, legal departments in private enterprises and other collaborative detectives, trust the information provided by these professionals regarding contact details such as the address or the telephone number of a private individual or a company, subject to an investigation.

Two reasons apply to the request of this sort of assignments. On the one hand, the first reason why a skiptracing report is requested to a private investigator is to find out information which is different to the one provided by the usual channels. The client profile in the twenty-first century is different from the ones in previous periods. Nowadays, they have become amateur investigators who make previous arrangements to gather information regarding the subject. It is then, when the client has already tried to locate the subject at their own means and the search has proved unsuccessful, that the services of the private investigator are required.

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On the other hand, the skiptracing report of a private investigator is required because of the worthy legal aspects regarding the data provided. A particular address delivered by a private investigator is legally guaranteed. Regarding Spain, this legal guarantee contributes to the absence of reputational risk for a company, since the private investigator profession is regulated by Law and their reports are acknowledged by Justice

The twenty-first century private investigator contributes with their investigations to provide skiptracing reports which include legal and divergent information, such as a particular address and a verified contact telephone number. This sort of data cannot be provided by any other provider of commercial information.

Nevertheless, this type of investigation is not a novelty, since the first acquainted skiptracing requests on individuals or companies date from the mid-nineteenth century, as can be seen in several advertising examples, the earliest of them dated 1860.

The routes to follow and the sources of access in a skiptracing investigation are different whether a private individual or a company is involved.

Private Individuals

The information regarding private individuals is regulated by the laws of data protection. Consequently, the access to this sort of information is restricted.

The regulation on data protection is different according to the country. In the European Union, especially in

Spain, the source of the collection of data such as particular addresses or telephone numbers is regulated under strict laws and strong punitive actions by the Spanish Agency of Data Protection (AEPD). Therefore, the information has to be obtained from a public source or with the full consent of the inquired individual, provided, for instance, during the course of an interview.

According to the previous information, the importance of a report signed by a Spanish private investigator remains in the fact that it becomes



a private source of valuable data which can be used for the benefit of the client as it has the exclusive possibility to include personal data which cannot be achieved by others.

However, there is an essential condition to be fulfilled in order to request a skiptracing investigation: the client needs to advance a legitimate interest, in other words, to provide arguments that support the grounds on which the skiptracing report is requested. For instance, a financial entity can request an assignment to locate the address of a debtor who cannot be located.

In Spain, the private investigator profession is regulated by Law since April 2014. The article 48.1 in the Law of

Private Security sets out that:

“The services regarding private investigation, provided by private investigators, will consist in the carrying out of inquiries which are necessary to obtain and provide, on behalf of a third legitimate part, information and evidence of behaviour or private facts related to the following aspects:

The economic, labour, commercial, financial aspects, as well as private, familiar or social lives, excluding those developed in private homes and reserved places.”

Telephone Numbers

The telephone number is one of the most used means of contact, for instance, by collection agencies which most usually possess outdated information about the debtor and need different and updated telephone numbers. In cases like this, the target of the private investigator is to locate the number by means of their own experience and professional skills, by contacting relatives, neighbours, friends or other sources close to the private individual.

Two types of telephone numbers might be found throughout the process of investigation:

- *A landline telephone number which is associated with a home address or a business.* This sort of telephone number has one disadvantage: there has to be someone to answer the call whenever it is made. In other words, the call might be made when nobody is at home or, if it is a business address, the call might be unsuccessful because of the schedule hours. Once the telephone number is

located, it is important to develop an Internet research, since the results obtained may lead to a new line of investigation.

- *A telephone number which is directly linked to a specific individual.* This sort of telephone number holds an extra value and increases the possibilities of contact. Instant messaging applications like Whatsapp or Telegram, may allow to verify and re-enact the behaviour of the individual, as well as to provide a profile of the ideal contact schedule.

Address

The address is a type of information required for some purposes of communication, such as handing a judicial notice or a court injunction.

This information is usually provided by the client when the assignment is made. However, this information is likely to be partial and outdated. It is the task of the private investigator to, by means of their skills, complete the missing data or locate a different accurate address.

The fields needed to complete an address are four: name of the street, along with the number of the location, postal code, town/city and province.

There are two types of address:

- 1) *Home address:* It is the private address of the debtor, which must be verified by the detective. The sources of investigation regarding this type of address are several, being the neighbours of the individual a frequent source of infor-

ma tion. The depth and detail of the home address investigation and the description provided depends on the client needs. For instance, sometimes it is important to perform an examination of the area where the address is located, ascertain whether it is a property of the debtor or they live there as tenants, or carry out an inspection of the grounds.

- 2) *Business address:* It is the location where the individual investigated develops their professional activity. This address might correlate to a business centre, an office, a shop, a commercial premise, etc.

Information required to launch an investigation after a private individual

- *Name:* In Spain, people have two family names. The first one corresponds to the first surname of the father and the second one matches the first surname of the mother. The combination of the family names, together with the first name, may turn out a unique outcome, i.e. only one person has a determined sequence of name and surnames; or it may be a common name, in which case several individuals have the same combination of first name and family names.
- *Identification document number:* In order to avoid misunderstandings and increase efficiency, the client must provide the national identification document number, the residence document number or the passport number along with the rest of the information provided before the skiptracing

enquiry.

- *Date and place of birth:* These are some of the most important facts to carry out a skiptracing investigation, since they may help to dismiss people who have similar names in a social network, as well as the birth place may serve as a clue and starting point.
- *Home address:* As with the information above, it is a starting point for the skiptracing investigation. Even if the home address provided by the client may be incomplete, it does help in the course of the investigation.

Sources of access to the information of a private individual

The sources of access to this type of information differ whether the investigation is carried out after a private individual or a company.

- *Land Registry:* In Spain, it is a global registry that gathers data about all the records of every town or city. The name of a person or their identification number must be provided in order to perform a search in the archive, the result of which may lead to an address which is directly linked to the individual investigated or a business related to them.
- *Commercial Registry:* It is a registry common to the vast majority of countries in the world. In Spain, a centralised registry is available, which includes every company and company administrator, despite the town or city of provenance. By providing accurate facts about an individual, such as their name and identification number,

the registry delivers information about the companies related to them.

- *Internet:* A search by name provides restricted information when it comes to a web investigation, since the name by itself may not be sufficient if further information, such as the identification number of the individual, is lacking. Quite a lot of information will have to be dismissed if we are uncertain about the identity of an individual in a social network, forum or official publication. However, if the search is performed under the national identification number, there is a guarantee that the results found in the Internet are associated to the person we are trying to investigate. On the contrary, the information about a company available in the web is far more intensive than that of an individual, since corporate and advertising details, websites, and many other facts are usually available.
- *Social networks:* Social networks may provide valuable information about the location of an individual inquired about. A picture, a shared location, the friends with whom they share comments or feedback, may help to dismiss or verify specific information.
- *Chambers of Commerce:* Although not every professional is registered in the chambers of commerce, they provide information about freelancer individuals sorted by their professional

activities. The chambers of commerce are one of the few sources of information allowed by the Spanish Agency of Data Protection

- *Business reports:* They provide structured information about companies and their administrators which is recorded in the Commercial Registry.
- *Telephone number data bases:* They are basic tools regarding the research of telephone numbers linked to specific addresses. These data bases are useful as well to locate relatives, neighbours and businesses related to private individuals.
- *Geolocation tools:* More and more companies offer geolocation tools which analyse mobile telephones or pictures published in social networks.
- *Email addresses:* The email address as a means of contact is also a usual request by the clients, as it is usually linked to a smartphone. It is important to verify the legitimacy of the email address. Some Internet companies provide a free service of email verification.

Companies

The information regarding companies is subject to fewer legal constraints than the one regarding private individuals. In most cases, the private investor might find out some information useful as a starting point, although it is also common that the company subject of investigation remains closed or inactive, in which case the address of an associ-

ated operating company must be located. If the company relates to a small business, the detective needs to locate the address of the administrator.

It is advisable to include the name of the street as well as further details in an Internet search engine. The results obtained may provide us with a better knowledge of the nature of the address we have found and it will lead us to every website where the address is included, unveiling associated companies; changes regarding the brand name or if the address retrieved relates to a business centre.

During the course of the investigation, tools like Google Maps are likely to be used, since they virtually locate the address we are looking for. These tools may help us to anticipate an on-site visit as well as to find potential companies and nearby business.

Telephone number

The telephone number of a company office is usually a landline answered by an operator according to a defined schedule which must be considered. A skilled private investigator can verify the accuracy of a telephone number.

It is important, once a company telephone number is located, to test it in every Internet search engine available, since the results may provide information of interest, such as linked companies which use the same number.

Address

Four requirements are needed for an address to be considered as accurate:

- 1) Name of the street, including the number of the location
- 2) Postal code
- 3) City or town
- 4) Province

A distinction must be made according to the address of a company. On the one hand, there is a social address, that is, the official address of the company. On the other hand, there is an operation address, in other words, the place where the activity of the company is carried out. In some cases the social address and the operation address may be the same.

Data required to launch an investigation after a company

- *Name of the company:* When it comes to launching an investigation, it is essential to arrange the accurate and full name of the company, since it helps us to earn some time and prevents us from wasting money in flawed research involving official agencies. Once the assignment of an investigation is made, the clients usually provide commercial brand names or anagrams which may slow down the launching of the investigation. In cases like these, a previous work of investigation must be made in order to find out the right data behind them.
- *VAT number:* This fact may be the key to launching an investigation and to provide certainty that the company being investigated is the right one.
- *Address:* Even though the information which the client provides

might be useless for the private investor, it could still act as a clue to find out a new accurate address.

- *Operative:* Previous knowledge provided by the client about the purposes of a company investigated may help the private investor to dismiss companies which have similar names.

Sources of access to the information of a company

- *Official agencies:* As with private individuals, it is possible to carry out an investigation in a variety of registry offices, such as the property or mercantile registries, which may provide information about the addresses belonging to the company or the place where it is operative.
- *Website:* The website of a company is one of the first steps to be checked during the course of a skiptracing investigation. The page providing information about the means of contact or the location of the company may provide an address that should be verified in a second step.
- *Credit Report:* Credit reports ought to be one of the first enquiries in the investigation. Some companies provide rough mercantile information worldwide as well as some are specialised in a certain country. Consequently, it might be very easy to find the ideal provider.
- *Internet Data:* Valuable quality information can be found by means of the search engines at our disposal, which may give us

guidance on the accuracy of the address. Every company is a different world, according to that, the results obtained can be diverse.

Conclusions

In short, skiptracing is crucial to a great variety of clients worldwide. The investigation of a private investor starts where the public sources of information, open to the companies, end. As a private source of information, skiptracing reports made by private investors provide worthy material and legal guarantees.

Process and management of the investigation vary whether the enquiry regards a private individual or a company, as well as the sources of information are different when it comes to a company or a private individual, being more restricted to the latest.

The greatest amount of information provided by the client, the more opportunities for success arise for the private investor in a skiptracing report. Therefore, it is our duty to persuade the clients to provide enough information in order to launch an efficient skiptracing investigation.



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