

## **Cellular Forensics: Are You Missing Valuable Evidence?**

**By**

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Communication is the life-blood of any relationship. People have to communicate to express their thoughts, desires, and needs. Whether the case you are investigating involves a large corporation's employees or on a wayward spouse, potential evidence can be found in the devices those subjects use to communicate. This includes the cell phone.

The cellular industry is moving at an astounding rate, perfecting services and delivering new and exciting technology. Today, you can get TV and internet on your cell phone. Emails are only a click away. Soon you'll be able to view full length movies on your cell phone (they are already in India). Presently, a mobile MySpace is being created and one company is working on video phone technology to enable the other party to view you in real time as you talk to them. All this and more on a handheld device you can carry in your pocket --- and it weighs less than your ring of keys.

A cell phone is a gem of information that, for the most part, has been untapped by the average legal investigator. A cell phone is not just a communication device, it contains a computer. That tiny SIM card in your phone is a micro-computer in itself. And, as with computers, just because something was deleted does not mean it may no longer be in that tiny chip or the phone's memory. Even if the bad-guy broke the phone's screen, all is not lost. You, as the legal professional, now have the ability to benefit from a specific service that will properly secure the evidence from a cell phone involved in your case.

The need to harvest cell phone, smartphone, and PDA information has led to the emergence of a new forensic technology, *cellular forensics*. As my favorite instructor pointed out, “Cellular forensics is today what computer forensics was 15 years ago.” Though in its infancy, cellular forensics is growing with each passing day but is not without growing pains.

Here’s something to ponder: Presently there are over 825 different cell phone models out there. Over a dozen companies manufacture the cell phones which work off of 17 major cellular communications network carriers in the USA. Each manufacturer uses their own software, batteries and various data cables. Also, each carrier has their own way of getting the call to you (i.e.: network such as CDMA, TDMA, iDEN, GSM, etc.) Anyone who specializes in this field will forever be playing catch-up with what the manufacturers are throwing out to the public at alarming rates. To complicate things, there is no one piece of equipment or software out there that can crack every model cell phone from every manufacturer. Depending on which model cell phone is submitted, the cellular forensics examiner must attack that plastic marvel from a myriad of directions. It is very labor intensive.

Now you may be thinking: “Can’t I just take the cell phone and run through it myself?” or “I’ll just turn it off and take it into court with me and show the judge what’s on it.” Yes, you can. But, stop and think of the legal ramifications. First of all, the entire phone and its contents will have to be submitted into evidence. Usually, that means someone has to give up their cell phone for the entire time of litigation while continuing to pay on the monthly contract. Most people do not want to pay for service they cannot use. Secondly, what are you going to do when the opposing council accuses you of

“planting” that information on the phone? Thirdly, what if you hit the wrong button and delete that incriminating text message? Or another incoming message deletes the one you were trying to save? Lastly, how are you going to get the evidentiary text message, picture or direct connect number off the phone and into a report? These are just a few of the reasons why you need a cellular forensic examiner. You need an unbiased, trained professional with the experience, knowledge, and equipment to extract, document, report and testify as to what he discovered on the suspect cell phone.

Law Enforcement agencies have since discovered the value of using cellular forensic examiners to obtain beneficial leads and information that would not have been secured had it not been professionally extracted from the suspect’s cell phone. Corporations utilize cellular forensic examiners to find security breaches in their companies. Domestic cases have been won because of deleted information forensically secured from a spouses’ Blackberry. And now private investigators can utilize this asset.

A cellular forensic examiner can obtain many items of evidence:

1. Text Messages
2. Pictures
3. Video
4. T9 directory (predictive text programmed by the cell phone owner)
5. Carrier evidence
6. Quick Response Messages (programmed “canned” responses)
7. Emails
8. Ring tones (many individuals assign a specific ring tone to a select caller)

Can deleted information be located? Yes, depending on when it was deleted and what other information has been added to the phone since the deletion. A single SIM card can only hold up to 12-20 messages. In addition, cell phones are very unstable. They are not to be played around with but must be handled carefully like any other piece of valuable evidence in a case.

Every business, criminal or domestic relationship is driven by one thing: Communication. The cellular phone is a life line to these parties. Cellular forensics can help you grab the evidence while it's available! Don't take a chance on losing priceless information that could be the deciding factor in winning your case. Incorporate the expertise of the cellular forensics professional.

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