

INTERNET  
FORENSICS:  
STRIPPING AWAY  
ANONYMITY ON THE  
WEB

As global commerce and culture have moved online, so has wrongdoing – from trade-secret leaks to libel, from Nigerian scams to counterfeits – all of it hidden behind the many ways the Internet allows individuals behind websites, emails and postings to remain anonymous. The Mintz Group has substantial experience and expertise gathering hidden information on the Internet. We are often hired to strip away anonymity on the Web by finding the electronic clues people leave behind. Routine assignments include looking behind hard-to-trace email addresses and blog postings; and we have proprietary techniques to forensically analyze websites.

Many members of the Mintz Group’s staff – including computer scientists, former federal agents and former investigative reporters – have experience unearthing digital footprints and developing evidence online in complex cases.

Because the Web is global, our online-investigative capabilities strengthen our fact-gathering globally.

### **Types of Cases**

Our Internet-forensics services have proven effective in a wide variety of matters. In recent cases we have found evidence bearing on:

- Cover-ups by litigation opponents
- Misappropriation of trade secrets
- Distribution of stolen intellectual property
- Violations of US law from offshore
- Funding of “front groups”
- Defamation
- Domain squatting

### **Specific Services**

The Mintz Group has substantial experience in:

- Stripping away online anonymity from hard-to-trace email addresses and blog postings
- Collecting and analyzing a website’s hidden data such as who created it and when
- Tracking, recording and analyzing traffic on websites
- Forensically preserving online material for use in litigation or arbitration proceedings

### **Typical Assignments**

- We showed that a mysterious website criticizing our client was organized by a Washington lobbyist representing our client’s direct competitor. Specifically, our forensic review found data buried in documents on the website from which we determined that an employee of the competitor was actively involved in the management of the site (it was hosted on the same Internet server as the employee’s family website).



- On assignment from a film studio, we monitored the Web for evidence that a yet-unreleased motion picture had been bootlegged and released online. We found that metadata on the site that released the pirated movie provided clues to the identity of the website’s creator, information about the distribution of the movie and the location of the software that was used for the distribution. After we downloaded a copy of the film, we were able to learn more about the infringers when their programs communicated with our computers.
- A publisher asked us to investigate the pre-publication leak of a best-selling book after an anonymous blogger had posted excerpts of the book. By analyzing clues in the writings of the blogger and searching historical domain registration records, we found a defunct website with information that helped us identify him.
- On behalf of a new company in Asia, we researched a website containing pornographic content that used the same name as our client’s. We traced the website to the author of some of its content and learned the owner had a relationship to our client – he had apparently squatted on our client’s web name in bad faith, hoping for a pay-out.
- At the request of a client who suspected collusion among a number of parties within a health-services sector, we showed that a trade association was facilitating improper networking sessions among executives and vendors. Using archived versions of the trade association’s website, we identified the founders and other members of the association, many of whom were shown to have been violating their own bylaws and antitrust provisions. Our research helped launch a regulatory investigation.

### **Contacts**

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Some details in these case studies have been changed to protect client confidentiality.