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The Curbside Investigator

You might be wondering why I call myself The Curbside Investigator.

The Curbside Investigator is a Podcast that is free to listeners and available on the Web. It's a great learning tool for both young and "seasoned" investigators and it's a great way to kill time while on surveillance. Most of the show is recorded while I am on surveillance, hence the name "Curbside". You can hear road noise, sirens, and the occasional "My subject is active, gotta go" from me as I record. I'll talk more about Podcasts later. Let's get right to the fun stuff.

It's always a challenge to write about technology. It changes so fast that oftentimes websites are done and gone by the time an article goes to print. Many times, a service that was free or at least wildly inexpensive goes public and has a fee attached. However, regardless of whether a site or service exists or is expensive at some point in the future, it's important to discuss them here and now so that we can take advantage of them if they meet our specific needs. It is in that spirit that I offer a few choice sites that I feel might be of value to us as investigators. I don't make any promises that they will be around forever, but while they are available they can be invaluable.

Mologogo

Mologogo.com is a free GPS tracking service. Funny name, great service. It's online, easy to use and can be accessed from just about anywhere. There's a bunch of social networking features that it offers as well, but that's not what we are interested in. We just want the GPS tracking goodness. If you already have one of the listed GPS enabled phones, you can download the software, create an account and start using the service right away. If not, do what I did. Order the phone from Mologogo with software preinstalled and you'll get \$10 airtime included: All for \$79. The only additional charges are from Boost Mobile. The pre-paid carrier that the phone works on is Boost Mobile and the data plan is \$12 per month. If you use the phone to place calls, you'll incur per minute charges as well.

I purchased a phone a few months back for a domestic case. Set-up was simple and once the phone was charged, it started tracking. We simply dropped the phone in the subject's vehicle (in accordance with State law) and watched from the comfort of my office. Using my internet ready cell phone, I was able to pull up a map and follow the subject in real time while out in the field. Imagine, for a very small fee, using a disposable phone that costs a fifth of what a GPS tracker costs, being able to very loosely tail a subject while knowing exactly where they are at all times. It's a great bargain and if anything happens to the phone, it's easily and inexpensively replaced. Boost Mobile phones are available at your nearest Target store.

There is one caveat that is worth pointing out. The Mologogo application is designed for social networks. That means they generally want to broadcast your location to everyone on the service so you'll need to turn that off in the settings to keep it private. The program is basic, so if you need to archive the data, you'll have to print out the information daily as it's not designed to easily go back to a specific day and see what happened. For that, I'd recommend a professional grade GPS tracker.

If you need a quick and dirty GPS tracker and you don't want to spend a lot of money, Mologogo is just what you are looking for. Check it out at www.mologogo.com

Google Alerts

Why aren't you using Google Alerts? It's free and it's a great way to get information delivered to your inbox daily. Google Alerts is simply a custom Google search that you schedule according to your needs. Results are emailed to you automatically. I have an alert set for "Scott Stys" that let's me know anytime my name is mentioned anywhere on the internet. Another alert I have is for "Private Investigator" that gives me news articles that are related to PI's. If you are working on a big case that might get news coverage, why not set an Alert using relevant keywords. You'll get a daily update that may offer valuable information. You can also use it to monitor pending legislation that you are interested in following. There are tons of uses for Google Alerts and all you have to do is sign up for a free Google account. You can read more about it at www.google.com/alerts.

RSS

RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication" or "Rich Site Summary" I prefer the first definition. What it means to you is that RSS enabled web content can be delivered right to your browser, inbox or web enabled phone without you having to visit each individual website to see if anything is new. Every time a site is updated with new content, that content is pushed via RSS to your desktop. There are hundreds of RSS readers out there and you can pick the one that works for you. I recommend Google Reader because it's become a standard and it's easy to use. When you visit a website that is RSS enabled, you simply click on the "Subscribe" button that is usually located at the top of the page. On my website, The Curbside Investigator, at www.curbsideinvestigator.com you can find an orange button on the upper left hand side of the page. It will take you to a page where you can select your RSS reader from a list and have it automatically added to your list. Once you do that, new articles will be updated daily or according to your settings. All new articles will appear in your Google Reader page and you can read them or discard them according to your interests. It saves time and it's a great way to get valuable content delivered right to you.

GrandCentral

GrandCentral is a new toy for me. It's an all in one phone number. It may be the only phone number you'll ever need. Recently purchased by Google, GrandCentral isn't going away soon and it's free, so don't be afraid to try it out.

What you get with a GrandCentral number is one phone number and one mailbox. You can even pick the area code of the phone number. Features abound with GrandCentral. For example, you can record your calls, screen your calls and even personalize the voicemail greeting. Your GrandCentral number will ring different phones, in the order you choose so that you'll never miss an important call. Voice mail is delivered directly to your inbox but you can also access it via your phone. You can even switch phones in the middle of a call. I haven't actually tried that yet, but it sure does sound cool. Like many of Google's offerings, it's been in Beta for some time. You can reserve a number or find a friend that's using the service right now to get signed up.

Again, this is a free service and you can find out more about it at www.grandcentral.com

Skype

Skype is the old kid on the block. It's been around for a while and if you haven't been living under a rock, you've probably heard about it. It's similar to Vonage and other VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) programs but it really shines because of the voice quality and the fact that much of it is free. Using your computer, the Skype service and an inexpensive headset microphone, you can talk to other Skype users anywhere in the world for free. For a small fee, you can purchase a SkypeIn number that gives you a phone number where you can receive calls from regular phones to your Skype account. You can also purchase SkypeOut minutes for a reasonable price that allow you to call anywhere in the world. It's cheaper than cell phone rates and beats long distance charges by quite a bit.

One of the great features of Skype that I use all the time is Instant Messaging. It's similar to AIM, Yahoo and MSN in that you can see who's online, send them files and chat. If you need to actually talk to them, just click on their name and place a call. Skype also allows up to 10 people for conference calls and the Video calling feature is fantastic if you have a webcam.

Find more about Skype at www.skype.com and add me. My Skype ID is "sunsetwest".

Podcasts

By now, I hope you've all heard of my Podcast, The Curbside Investigator. Like just about all other Podcasts, it's available free on Itunes, via RSS feed (and you should know what that is now) or via the website. It gets even better though. There's literally thousands of Podcasts out there for you to listen to or even watch. On any subject you can imagine. All for free! In simple terms, Podcasts are prerecorded audio or video shows that are made available on the internet. Unlike traditional radio, you can go back and listen to past shows at any time. You can store them on your own computer, put

them in your iPod or other MP3 player, or just listen to them right on your computer at your desk. Believe it or not, Podcasting has traditional media scared. Anyone can create a Podcast and disperse their own content in any way they see fit.

But what does this mean to you the listener? It means that when you are on a long surveillance, a cross country drive, an airplane or even a trip to the market, you can have fresh content delivered right to you. More importantly however, you pick the content based on your special interests. Personally, I listen to serialized novels that are generally read by the authors themselves. They bring the characters to life in a special way because they are intimately familiar with their writing. And they do it for free! You won't get that from Audible.com.

If you've already got iTunes on your computer, click on the Podcasts tab and look around. Then it's just another click to subscribe. If you don't have iTunes, take a look at some of the Podcast directories out there like www.blubrry.com or www.podshow.com. Those are just a couple of places to find great Podcasts.

Don't discount Podcasts as just light entertainment; there's financial Podcasts, marketing Podcasts and legal Podcasts. I guarantee you'll find something that interests you.

You can find my Podcast, The Curbside Investigator, at www.curbsideinvestigator.com.

And of course, if you have any questions about the information presented or would like me to take a look at a new website you've discovered, just email me.

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