7 Hidden Tactics for Skip Tracing Online

*Tips and tricks from the experts*
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Introduction

The World Wide Web is called that for a reason: it’s full of connections. As an investigator, your job is to find the connections that will uncover key information about your target.

With an expanding universe of information, investigative professionals have been introduced to new levels of efficiency, but at the same time face significant new challenges: an overdose of data.

With billions of web pages at your fingertips, your access to the most current information has never been better. However, you need to know how to sift through that data to gather meaningful results. This need has produced the multi-billion dollar enterprise known as Google. As a search engine, Google gives you the tools to search through the vast web and locate what you want.

Most people have grown accustomed to searching Google for certain keywords: the nearest movie theater, a phone number for the pizza shop, or even to research a health concern. What most people don’t know is that Google has tools that can drill even deeper into the web--tools that go farther than the standard search.

These tools lend themselves perfectly to the art of skip tracing.

When you combine the techniques in this eBook with an updated database like LocatePLUS, it makes it nearly impossible for skips to escape your reach.

Happy hunting!
Tactic #1: Focus Your Search

The World Wide Web is made up of billions of web pages filled with useful information, but too much information isn't useful. Instead of drowning in web pages, Google gives you a tool to search and locate what you need.

On a basic level, you visit www.google.com and simply type in what you want to find. It could be a name, address, or business information—anything really.

But what if you search for John Doe? The results could be all over the place. You could find a John Doe Sandwich Shop, or a John Doe Financial Services firm, not to mention thousands of people named John Doe across the world.

HOW TO
That brings us to the first tactic. Luckily, Google gives you more flexibility to isolate your search. Instead of just typing in your keywords, get specific. For example, use quotation marks to limit your search:

```
Google  
"John Doe CA"
```

Google will only return web pages containing that exact phrase. This step eliminates A LOT of needless information.

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Tactic #2: Find Private Information on Social Networks

What is social networking?

Simply stated, social networks are websites where people can communicate with one another and share content like photos or videos. Examples include websites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Myspace.

Why are social networks important to your investigation?

Did you know that 65.6 million adults in the United States use social networking sites on a regular basis? That is nearly one third of the entire population.

These social network users are sharing personal details about their life and whereabouts on a daily basis. This makes social networking sites one of the most important sources for you to find up to date information.

HOW TO

Having the ability to search social networking sites quickly and effectively is a valuable tool in any investigation. Using Google, type in the following query:

“John Doe” site:facebook.com

“John Doe” site:twitter.com

“John Doe” site:linkedin.com

“John Doe” site:myspace.com

In fact, you can use this search for other sites as well—they don’t have to be social networks. There may be a certain directory, or company website that you need to search through. All you have to do is swap out the web address for the site that you want to search.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The results of your query will be returned just like any other Google search, except all of the pages are from one website.
Once you find an individual’s profile, you will typically have access to contact information like an address and phone number. In many cases, you will also be able to view conversations that the individual has had with his or her online connections (aka “friends” or “followers”).

If you are unable to locate the individual’s profile, you should look for other connections. The target of your investigation may not be active online, however it’s likely that at least several acquaintances, friends, family or co-workers are. Try to uncover your target’s name in conversations online. Search for nicknames, the names of restaurants/bars they frequented, or where he or she works.

Social Media Demographics:

- Over 65% of Adults Now Use Social Networks
Tactic #3: Find Hidden Documents

Did you know that the web doesn't just consist of web pages? There’s a whole lot more information stored online than just pictures and text. In fact, there are billions of documents in a variety of file types that can be discovered using a simple search tactic. Agendas, meeting minutes, school records—there are a lot of things that are stored online. Google can recover these documents and help you target your search for valuable information.

HOW TO
To find files that are stored online and accessible to the general public, use the following query in Google:

```
"Your Search Terms" filetype.pdf
```

You can use a name, a company name, an address—your search terms will vary depending on your investigation, but the Google command “filetype” will allow you to search a variety of documents. Here is an example of searching for a student (they can be difficult to track down due to unknown credit history):

Here are the results, and take note that each link allows you to download the PDF file:

```
[pdf] Honor Roll
www.design.upenn.edu/files/pda-v17-8-honor_roll_09.pdf
File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat - Quick View
Honor Roll, 18, Christy Bergland MFA70, Mitchell S. Berlin PhD’86 ....... effort to ensure the accuracy of this Honor Roll, errors can happen....

[PDF] SAMPLE STUDENT ACTIVITY RESUME #1 John Smith Ridge Hi...
www.bernardsboe.com/.../Sample%20Student%20Activity%20Resume...
File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat - Quick View
John Smith, Ridge High School, Extracurricular Activities, School .... Ridge HS Honor Roll, 9, 10, 11, 12, Certificate of Honorable Merit in The National Latin...

[PDF] 5-11 HONOR ROLL.indd
www.skans.edu/southwesterner/2006fall/p06.pdf
File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat - Quick View
Honor Roll of Donors, 6. Founders Cabinet a Ward Cole a Jim Dole a Jim and Bette Farrey, Founders Circle a David and Linda Smith, Founders Council...
```
Tactic #4: Image/Video Search

Over the years, Google has indexed (kept track of) hundreds of billions of images and videos. Back in 2006, Google bought YouTube, a popular video sharing service and has since incorporated the website into its standard search features.

What does this mean for you and your investigations?
The large majority of these images and videos are “tagged” with descriptive titles. In many cases, they will even have a name associated with the file. By searching images and video by name, you are likely to return results that are associated with your target individual. If your target individual does not appear in this type of search, his or her name may still return results of people with whom they are connected.

Where do these images and videos come from?
Whenever a website uses images in its design, Google keeps track. However, an overwhelming majority of the images in Google’s index come from user-generated content sites or social networks like Facebook. *This means that the images and their links you have access to search are often personal,* and can tell a lot about individuals: where they work, where they like to go out, who their friends are, etc.

A recent craze, especially among a younger demographic, is to share videos of themselves through sites like YouTube, Vimeo, MetaCafe, and others. These websites allow users to upload an unlimited amount of videos for free, so there is an extremely large database of video content available for you to search.

HOW TO
In the last two years, Google has significantly improved its image and video search. Google has dedicated entire pages to sort through billions of records.

To access one of these tools, navigate to the Google home page, and choose either “images” or “videos” from the top menu bar.

**Image Search Links:**
- Google Images (http://images.google.com/)
- Bing Images (http://www.bing.com/images/)
- Yahoo Images (http://images.search.yahoo.com/)

**Video Links:**
- YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/)
- Vimeo (http://www.vimeo.com/)
- MetaCafe (http://www.metacafe.com/)
You can search for anything here, just like you would in a normal Google search. The difference is that your results will be returned in the form of images or videos. Everything is displayed in a gallery format with thumbnails. Clicking a specific thumbnail will allow you to visit the source page of that image or video.

**Digging Deeper**

While Google offers a number of parameters in the sidebar to help narrow your search, you can also combine some of the tactics described in this eBook to further focus your search. For example, if you would like to only uncover images from the popular social networking site, Facebook, use the site specific search operator:

"John Doe" site: facebook.com

Since you are using the image search, Google will only return images from Facebook. This is ideal for tracking down profile pictures, or pictures of family and friends.
Tactic #5: Blog Search

What is a “blog”?  
Popularized by websites such as Wordpress, or Google’s “Blogger”, self-publishing on the web has been termed, “blogging”.

A “blog” is short for “Web log”, and it is a platform for people to record their thoughts, musings, etc.—it’s really like an online journal for the public to read. Many people update their blogs on a daily basis, presenting a wide range of content for you to search for an investigation.

Google has provided you with a powerful tool to search through this information.  
Google Blog Search: [www.google.com/blogsearch](http://www.google.com/blogsearch)

**HOW TO**  
Google Blog Search scans millions of blog posts to return results that would otherwise be difficult to uncover. In fact, Google Blog Search also comes with its own set of search operators to help target your investigation with more precision:

- **inblogtitle**: Searches for keywords in a specific blog title
- **inposttitle**: Searches across specific blog post titles
- **inpostauthor**: Limits searches to specific author names
- **blogurl**: Searches for keywords in the blog’s URL ([www.example.com/sample-post](http://www.example.com/sample-post))

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"I always head to LocatePLUS first, since it usually means I don't have to search anywhere else" - Connie Bonnette, Slough Private Investigations
The above example will search for the keyword vacation in the blog titled, “John Doe’s Blog”.

Popular Blogging Platforms:

- www.blogspot.com
- www.wordpress.com
- www.tumblr.com
- www.livejournal.com
- www.posterous.com
- www.blogger.com

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Tactic #6: Google Alerts

You may not have time to continually monitor the web and see if new information presents itself for your investigation. Luckily, Google Alerts is a tool that never shuts down, and will automatically notify you via email 24/7.

Google Alerts allows investigators to keep track of news concerning a specific topic, business name, or person. Anyone can use it to track whatever or whoever they are targeting. Start by telling Google what to track by typing in your keywords. Then, whenever the search engine finds new content matching your description, it sends you an email alert with a link to the new page.

For Example:
You set up a Google alert to track the name “John Doe”. The following day, one of his friends writes a blog post that mentions “John Doe”. Even though the friend just dropped his name in a passing comment, Google finds this post. Immediately, you are sent an email notification with a link to the blog post mentioning your target.

HOW TO:
Navigate to the following page: http://www.google.com/alerts

At the top of the page, type the keywords you would like to track: e.g. “skip tracing”

- Choose the type of results that you want to see. You can opt to get alerts from everything, or specify the source type: a blog, news update, video or a discussion.
- Choose the frequency of your alerts. This could be instant or up to once a week.
- Choose the volume of your results—Google will deliver everything possible, or filter out things that may not be useful
- Finally, choose the email address where you would like to receive the alerts
Tactic #7: Google Map Searches

One of Google’s most impressive search functions became available to the public in 2005—it was aptly named, “Google Maps”. The search was initially most popular for travelers looking for driving directions; however, it was quickly adopted for many other purposes as well.

Google Maps is now integrated with another product, Google “Earth”. The combination of both technologies creates a fast and astoundingly accurate map search that shows actual satellite footage for any address around the world. In the United States, there is now a three-dimensional rendering of main streets, giving you the ability to virtually “drive down the street”.

Using only an address you can uncover:

- All businesses at that address
- Names and phone numbers
- 3D views of the building at that address
- Real-time traffic updates

The satellite views are especially helpful for locating assets, for example, cars, boats or other equipment that may be stowed in a back yard or adjacent lot.

HOW TO:
Navigate to the page: http://maps.google.com

Start by typing in an address. Google Maps will then drop a “pin” on the location you entered and will populate additional information, when available, in the left sidebar. Don’t know the address of a public location? Just start typing the name in the search bar and Google Maps will return a list of potential locations.
Google Maps is perfect for confirming an address, and getting a clear visual of a property before making the trip out. If you are conducting surveillance, it can give you a strategic “lay of the land” to find the best angles, parking, entrances/exits, etc. It pays to have this information beforehand, rather than coming into a situation blind.

Here is an example of the street level view. You can literally drive a “virtual car” down the street to peruse the neighborhood:
Moving Forward

While Google has developed fantastic tools for you to use in your skip tracing efforts, nothing can replace an industry leading database that is designed for returning fast and accurate results.

Using free tools like Google in tandem with the LocatePLUS skip tracing database is the fastest way to track down a missing person, or conduct any type of investigation.

Check out our [www.LocatePLUS.com](http://www.LocatePLUS.com) website today for more information:

**Searches Available:**

- People
- Addresses
- Social Security Numbers
- Civil Records
- Phone (Cell & Land Lines)
- Motor Vehicle Records
- Criminal Records
- Date of Birth
- Professional Licenses and Permits
- Assets
- Court
- Civil Records
- Business & Corporation

**Contact our Sales Manager:**

Alyssa Gullotti – 888-746-3463 ext. 112
agullotti@locateplus.com

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