



# THE Connection

Official Newsletter of the Georgia Association of Professional Private Investigators, Inc.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Next  
GAPPI Meeting will be  
the  
**2013 Spring Training**

April 26-27, 2013

Wyndham Atlanta  
Galleria

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Just a reminder that  
there will be no regular  
membership meeting in  
May.

## 5 Tips for Investigating a Person with a Common Name

Editor's note: This article was written after consultation with two experienced investigators. The information provided below may not be applicable to every investigation in every state, and other methods of investigating individuals with common names may exist.

There's no getting around it. There are more than 45,000 people with the name John Smith in the U.S., and somebody wants a background check on one of them. It's certainly possible to find one in 45,000, but it's going to take a bit of research. Due to the commonality of this quandary, each investigator has a few tricks of the trade to locate a subject with a common name. However, each case is different; and we wanted to give some experienced investigators a chance to collaborate and share some ways they have located a subject with a common name.

We invited Detectives Pamela Hay and Brian Willingham to discuss how to combat a common name. "I think this is an area where you can separate a good investigator from everybody else," Willingham says. He began his response by detailing the amount of articles and blog posts he has written on how to conduct a background check on a common name -- calling it one of the most difficult challenges within the profession. Willingham has been a private investigator for 11 years, conducting thousands of background checks throughout his career. His investigations company, The Diligentia Group, specializes in background investigations. Hay is president of Broad Range Investigations, specializing in criminal and civil investigations. She also has top secret clearance with the government to conduct their background checks, and teaches a Professional Investigations course at Boston University.

Here are Hay and Willingham's tips on locating a subject with a common name:

### 1. Identify all the factual information that you can on the subject.

When beginning an investigation, the sky's the limit. Willingham stressed the importance of continuously thinking out of the box when drafting up the first profile, there's always a chance that there is more information out there, and it could ultimately make the job a lot easier. Willingham starts with a comprehensive list of everything he can gather about the individual. Here's a few examples of the facts he will begin looking for:

- Address history
- Work history
- Spouses names
- Ex spouses names
- Children's names
- What schools do the children attend.
- What organizations the subject has been involved in.
- Possible investments the subject is involved in.

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By having an array of data on the subject, that spans years across different territories, the investigator can conduct more thorough research confirming that he or she has the correct person -- which introduces the next tip . . .

## 2. Conduct combination searches.

A combination search is one of the most comprehensive ways to determine that the investigator is researching the correct subject. Willingham explains that if the investigator knows that the subject worked for a certain company or organization, he or she can search within those records with the subject's name and minimize the data that is being reviewed. These searches may lead to a middle initial that will then help specify the investigation even more. When it's known that one piece of data is true, combination searches can help eliminate false information, and lead the investigator to factual data that will further his or her search.

## 3. Go to the courthouses in the areas they have lived to conduct on-site searches.

Criminal records tend to have a specific identification number such as a social security or a drivers license number. Determining an identification number will highlight the John being investigated from all of the other Johns out there. In addition, obtaining the physical criminal record is a much more reliable strategy than an online search. Online document information is entered manually which leaves room for error. It only takes one error to prohibit a useful document from coming up in an online search. Also, if online sites such as PACER yield no results, this does not necessarily mean that the subject doesn't have a criminal record. Not all states report to online databases. Going to the courthouse and searching records is surely the most fail safe way to review a subject's criminal history, and to be sure that the correct John is being investigated.

## 4. Continue speaking with the client as a source of information.

When following the protocol, the client will provide the initial information for the investiga-

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tor to begin the background check -- Hay advises a constant flow of communication throughout the entire investigation. The investigator should be sure that he or she knows everything that the client knows about the subject. This may involve asking clients detailed questions and scheduling multiple meetings to be sure that both the investigator and the client are on the same page. It's not uncommon for information or memories to arise after the initial meeting to discuss the investigation.

Hay gave an example of a background check she completed on a subject with a common name. Her first attempt at finding the subject yielded no results. She spoke with her client to hopefully get some more information, and it turned out the client knew that the subject had a mail-order bride. With this new information, Hay was able to locate the wife via social security records; because she received her social security number in her 20s, this narrowed her search significantly. Once she had located the wife, she was able to find her subject via marriage records. It's not uncommon for this amount of leg work to be necessary to locate a subject -- but without continuing the conversation with her client, Hay would not have been able to complete the background investigation.

#### **5. Go out into the field for surveillance activity.**

With all of the capabilities of today's internet, it's easy to get carried away with online databases. Although they can make the job a lot easier, don't rule out surveillance activity when investigating a subject. Hay suggests to figure out where a person frequents, this may be through interviewing sources and, or discussing with your client, in order to follow through and further your investigation.

Background investigations are one of the more common reasons for a client to hire an investigator: for hiring a new employee, a nanny, agreeing to a business deal, and more. Eventually, one of those people is going to be named John Smith, and not every investigator can locate one out of 45,000. As Willingham mentioned, this is an opportunity to rise to the top of the investigation field. Incorporating these strategies in your practice should alleviate some difficulty in locating the subject, and allow you to continue to grow and excel within your business.

This article was written by Amy Thomson and was originally published on [www.pinow.com](http://www.pinow.com).

## 50 Things You Can Learn from One Unhappy Customer

Complaint and conflict resolution is a component of every job, but some professions are more susceptible to complaints. Accountants, for example, may be on the receiving end of some heated complaining as they deal with a person's income. Because private investigators can work on cases in which emotions run high, they may see more complaining from clients who are facing grief, loss, or betrayal. Regardless of what type of business you are a part of it's important to have complaint resolution procedures in place. It only takes one dissatisfied client to show you many ways your firm can improve. Here are 50 things you can learn from one unhappy customer:

1. Whether or not you or your company have personal limitations in dealing with an unsatisfied client.
2. What strengths and weakness you have when it comes to dispute resolution.
3. Whether or not you have good conflict resolution procedures in place.
4. What you need to change about your complaint handling process.
5. Who in your company has a the best demeanor and background for handling complaints.
6. Who in your company is not suited for handling complaints and shouldn't get involved.
7. Who should be fielding complaints when they do come in and how that communication should flow through the company.
8. Where any gaps in your complaint intake and follow up processes are occurring.
9. What employees should be interacting with clients and what ones should focus on backend work.
10. Which team members need more customer service training.
11. What information, if any, could have been provided up front and prevented the issue from occurring.
12. What items were not clear in the original agreement.
13. Where any major breakdowns in communication with clients are occurring.
14. What internal communication breakdowns are happening within your company.
15. What demeanor and phrasing works when your firm is to blame for the mix up.
16. What demeanor and phrasing works when your firm did not make a mistake.
17. Some procedures and processes might not be worth changing even in light of a complaint.
18. It might be time to invest in customer relationship management software.
19. It might be also time to revisit your strategy for communicating with clients and customer service.
20. What may be preventing you from getting repeat clients.

21. What your current clients might be frustrated with but not telling you about.
22. Why you may have lost past clients.
23. What is most valued by the people who are using your services.
24. Your firm may not be delivering in full what it is promising.
25. What type of clientele your firm has the best experience working with.
26. Whether or not you have the tools needed to turn an unhappy client into a happy client.
27. Responding to a complaint the right way makes a big difference.
28. Your attitude or temper might need some minor adjusting.
29. It might be time to invest in some conflict resolution literature or to attend a seminar on handling complaints.
30. What works for one client and is preferred by that client might not work for a different client.
31. You may need to put your customer service policy and procedures in writing as a reference guide for employees.
32. There are components and procedures that your clients might not understand.
33. Your employees might not understand something and therefore communicating that to clients incorrectly.
34. There may be complaints that are severe enough to warrant a refund.
35. There may be better options for resolving a conflict than supplying a refund.
36. How you can improve your services or products.
37. How you can improve or change the way you sell your services or products.
38. More insight into what your client's needs are.
39. Whether you're approaching complaints as a nuisance or a learning opportunity.
40. Approach is everything and attitude makes a difference.
41. What component of the process is a larger issue. (i.e. invoicing vs. phone etiquette).
42. How your clients prefer to be contacted.
43. When is the right time to respond via phone vs. via email.
44. You might be waiting too long to respond to complaints.



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45. How frequently your clients want updates.
46. How forgiving your unhappiest of customers are going to be.
47. What caliber of mistakes your company is making (i.e. being late to a meeting vs. completely forgetting to follow up).
48. Whether or not you're making it easy enough for your clients to complain.
49. What method of complaint filing will give you the best information from your clients (i.e. anonymous survey, phone call, email).
50. Each complaint will be different with a different client, different set of circumstances, and different issues being brought to the table. By approaching each complaint as a learning opportunity you will be able to continually fine tune your company's procedures and processes.

If you're not getting complaints, consider making it easier for your clients to make complaints. In making it easier for your clients to complain you will have better opportunities to identify what isn't working and ultimately make all of your clients happier in the long run.

This article was written by Kimberly Faber and was originally published on [www.pinow.com](http://www.pinow.com).

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