Digging Deeper
Tools and techniques in four investigations

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Lise Olsen  Alejandra Xanic  Lee Zurik  Denise Malan
EXPLORE LIES & OMISSIONS
Case Study no 1: The Congressman Who Failed to disclose his income

Later he disclosed his salary as coming from a company that did not exist. How did we know?
• The company was not registered.
• It had no website.
• It was mentioned only on the congressman’s personal website.
Case Study No 1: The Congressman Who Failed to disclose his income

Initial sources:
- Google advanced searches,
- Stockman’s Congressional financial disclosures
- The Wayback Machine
The Congressman also failed to disclose his businesses...

We found and mapped them. Sources:
• Corporation Wiki
• Secretary of state websites
• County Clerk’s offices (for fictitious business names/dba registries.)
Red flags showed up in our spreadsheets. His businesses and his campaign funds shared the same P.O. Boxes.

His ex-campaign treasurer and former house employee was also his business partner.
Stockman's filings don't explain his income

Congressman only Texas member not to file a disclosure in 2012

[Diagram of Stockman's financial relationships]

Houston Chronicle Graphic.
Do it yourself:
Create a simple spreadsheet that answers key questions

1. WHAT business names do they use?
2. WHO are their business partners
3. WHO are their employees?
4. WHO are their family members?
Do it yourself:
Create a simple spreadsheet that answers key questions

6. WHAT addresses do they use?

7. WHO else is associated with those addresses?

8. WHAT RULES or LAWS did they break?
Key tools for research:

• Corporation Wiki
• Open Corporates
• Investigative Dashboard
Key tools for research:

- Social media accounts
- Business websites and LinkedIn
- Wayback machine (to see older version of websites)
- Our own reporting archives – organized in Document Cloud and listed in Excel/Google Sheets
BUILD CHRONOLOGIES
BUILD CHRONOLOGIES:
Case study no 2: The prisoner who claimed he’d killed 11 girls in the 1970s.
By building two sets of chronologies, we set out to determine if prisoner Edward Bell could be a serial killer – or not for the A & E series The Eleven

1. Where did he live and when?
2. Where did he work and when?
3. Where was he arrested and when?
We compared the Bell chronology to his victims’ lives and deaths.

1. Where and when were they abducted?
2. Where and when were their bodies found?
3. Where and when were living victims abducted or attacked?
Key sources for criminal’s chronology:

- Old police records
- Property records
- Business records
- Interviews with criminal’s friends, neighbors and business associates.
- Court files
- Interviews with police
- Organized in spreadsheets, locations mapped and visited.
Key sources for victims’ chronology

• Interviews with murder victims’ families and friends
• Interviews with other living victims.
• Visits to homes and crime scenes
• Medical examiner’s reports
• Police reports
• Crime scene photos and diagrams
Investigative question: Was Bell in the right places at the right times to have committed these crimes?

Conclusion: Bell could be a serial killer. He lived or worked very near where nine of 11 victims were abducted or where their bodies were dumped. He admitted to being the last person to see two of the 11 victims.

But we could neither exclude him as suspect, nor tie him closely to every crime.
EXPLORE CONNECTIONS
Case study 3: How did a sex trafficker remain in business after a federal raid forced him to flee to Mexico?
After the bust, there were more calls for help from victims. One young girl called 911 from this house.
EXPLORE CONNECTIONS: WHO OWNS THE PROPERTY? What else do they own?
Exploring cantina connections:

• The house, where a young woman was held captive was owned by a woman who operated a bar linked to El Gallo’s ring...

• The bar owner also had been arrested in the 1990s for prostitution with another bar owner linked to the ring.
Despite crackdown, Houston cantina sex trade persists

Bars that were bases for sex ring still open for business

LISE OLSSEN

Houston Chronicle
Key documents

• Property ownership records
• 911 tape
• Interviews with police
• State court files (for old arrest)
• Federal court files
• Liquor license and inspection records for the bars.
SOURCES: License and inspection records exist for all kinds of businesses and occupations

• Key questions: Licensed or not? Pays taxes or not? Registered or not? Fined recently? Inspected recently?
Include images in public record requests: Photos, videos, PowerPoints...

Bar photos showed: Secret passageways, hidden bedrooms...
Request images:
Bar inspection photos showed: escape hatches; an altar to the Santa Muerte.

Inspection photos showed: Secret hallways, hidden passages...
One Houston traffickers posed his song on YouTube...

Key questions:
Explore ties between people and places

• Search property records. Who owns the property? What is it worth? Who pays the taxes?
• Marriage and divorce data: Who’s married to whom?
• Visit or view addresses on a map. Who are neighbors? What businesses are there now? What was there before?
• What calls for services have been made at those addresses to police?
Key questions:
Explore ties between people and places

• Are the businesses licensed?
• Who licenses/inspects the businesses? Do inspectors have photos, videos? Reports?
• What other names are/were used by people and by businesses?
• Search state, federal and court records under all individual and business names.
CROWDSOURCING
& COLLABORATIONS
Case study 4: An investigation of abuse inside the Southern Baptist convention begins when *Houston Chronicle* reporter Robert Downen, notices a civil lawsuit, does some Google searches and gets 500 hits...
Initial sources:

1. Civil court records
2. Newspaper archives – especially niche publications on Baptists/Christians
3. Clergy abuse whistleblowers and Baptist bloggers
4. A Google alert with key terms related to the investigation.
Steps in the Abuse of Faith investigation.

1. Editor Steve Riley formed a team.
2. We built internal lists.
3. We requested public records nationwide.
4. We archived and shared public records via Document Cloud.

https://www.houstonchronicle.com/local/investigations/abuse-of-faith/
The Abuse of Faith team ultimately found:

- More than 300 Southern Baptist church leaders publicly accused, sued or prosecuted for sex crimes/abuse with 700+ victims
- 1,536 public records in 20+ states.
- And we shared data for more than 270 cases on the internet for the public and other reporters.
Abuse of Faith data:
https://projects.houstonchronicle.com/2019/southern-baptist-abuse/

Search our database of Southern Baptist church pastors, leaders, employees and volunteers who pleaded guilty or were convicted of sex crimes.

By Lise Olsen, Robert Downen, John Tedesco, Jordan Rubio, Matt Dempsey, Joyce Lee and Rachael Cicerson.

The Southern Baptist Convention has declined to keep a list of key church officials and volunteers convicted of sex abuse crimes. The Houston Chronicle compiled this list of records and information; it is current as of December 2018.

Search the database below. To read our series, go here.

Questions, updates or feedback about this database? Click here to fill out our feedback form.
Reader tips were especially valuable for finding documents about missionaries.
We built a simple google form to seek tips from readers:

Abuse of Faith: Help us investigate

We appreciate you sharing your story and we take your privacy seriously. We will not share your information with anybody without your permission. And even with your permission, we will always contact you before publishing anything about your story.

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Name (optional)
Your answer
What is your email address? *
Your answer
Where does this story take place? *
Your answer
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