

CASE STUDY

Snapchat and Murder

Meticulous analysis reveals critical cellphone evidence

Client

Defense Attorney

Service

Digital Forensics

The Situation

A member of a notorious gang was found murdered in a small California city. Police had arrested a known associate of the gang (the Suspect) on grounds that cell phone towers showed his location at the crime scene during the given time window. The Suspect claimed that he did not commit the murder, but was at the crime scene. He identified another individual (the Defendant) as the murderer. The Defendant denied being at the crime scene, and denied being with the Suspect at any point during the day that the crime was admitted. The Defendant's attorney hired Califorensics to look through his cell phone for evidence pertaining to the crime.

The Challenge

Califorensics was tasked with obtaining records from the Defendant's cell phone provider, mapping his location using cell phone tower data, and creating a timeline of his position and actions around the time of the crime. We discovered that the police timeline used in the investigation was inaccurate by two hours. The police had been using cell phone tower data on Mountain Time, based on the location of the cellular provider's headquarters, not the location of the tower. Correcting this timeline was a challenge, but once adjusted, we could analyse the Defendant's cell phone for evidence.

The Solution

We adjusted the cell tower data by two hours to correct the crime scene timeline, which proved critical for the investigation. Our experts then set about analysing the Defendant's mobile phone. They found that on the day of the murder he had downloaded an app that enabled

him to capture and save photos sent via Snapchat, without the sender's knowledge. The app creates and saves 'stories' using photos from the user's key contacts. One of the Snapchat stories provided very revealing and important evidence that needed to be brought to the attention of the attorney.

The Outcome

The 'story' found on the app showed the Defendant sitting with a group of friends on the day of the murder with a table full of drugs. In a photo taken just 20 minutes before the murder, the Defendant can be seen pointing a gun at the camera. This evidence would have almost certainly been uncovered by the prosecution during the investigation. The defense attorney would have remained unaware of this crucial evidence, and this may have badly affected his representation of the case. Califorensics presented this evidence to the attorney, who was then able to properly prepare and mitigate the impact of the photos.

Key Success

Using digital investigation techniques, Califorensics was able to successfully uncover crucial evidence, allowing the attorney to make the necessary adjustments to his case.

