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FINDING PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES

Tips to Locate a Hard-to-Find Person

Patrons frequently need to find people and businesses, for instance to serve them with legal papers. If you cannot find a person, it may be possible to serve them by publishing the notice in the newspaper. Before you can do this, you need to prove to the judge that you have made a thorough, diligent search for the person.

Here are some resources and strategies to help you locate people and businesses, or at least make a thorough search, both in the Law Library and on the Internet.

INTRODUCTION

It is very important to keep careful records of every search you make, and the results of that search, when looking for a person or a business. This is good advice for any type of research, but it is crucial if you are trying to find someone so you can serve them with legal papers. You will use these records to prove that you have made a diligent search for the person, so the judge can authorize service by publication. Keep copies of your letters and responses, and keep a diary of your contacts.

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. Finding People

Here are some steps you can take to search for individuals.

1. Try personal service at the last known home and work addresses, using the Sheriff or process server. Ask for documentation of the process server's attempts to locate the party.
2. Search the telephone directory for the city where party was last known to live, and attempt contact at any listings that could possibly be the person to be served. Call telephone information (411). Try online phone books like www.whitepages.com and www.zabasearch.com. If you have a phone number but no address, try the reverse telephone lookup on these sites.
3. Contact relatives and friends who might know the party's whereabouts. Keep records of all these contacts, such as a diary detailing telephone calls and copies of letters you send, etc.
4. Go to the last known home and work address of the person yourself, and ask neighbors or co-workers if they know where to reach the person.

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5. Send a letter to the person at their last known addresses. Be sure to label the envelope "Return in 5 days if undeliverable." Send the letters registered and keep returned envelopes to show failure.
6. Check the County Recorder's and County Tax Assessor's indexes for the location where the party was last known to live or own real property.
7. Search for the defendant using "people finder" sites on the Internet. Try more than one; results are different. Suggested sites are listed below under "Websites and Online Databases."
8. If you know a name but only an approximate age, try www.birthdatabase.com/ to find their exact date of birth. This can help narrow a search.
9. Search for their profile on social media sites, like Facebook, Instagram, dating sites, or other sites that fit their interests, such as music or art sites. The paid site Spokeo.com can search many of these sites at once.
10. Contact trade unions or professional associations to which the person may belong. If they are a member of a licensed occupation, find the licensing agency for their occupation at verifyprolicense.com.
11. Contact the US Military for information about a service member's whereabouts. Resources for the various services are listed at usmilitary.about.com/cs/locatorservices/a/millocate.htm .
12. Check the local jail inmate list, and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation inmate locator service. To locate an incarcerated person, visit the following websites:
    a. California: www.cdcr.ca.gov/visitors/Inmate_Locator.html (916-445-6713).
    b. Federal: www.bop.gov/inmate_locator/index.jsp.
    c. For resources on locating prisoners in other states, see websearch.about.com/od/dailywebsearchtips/qt/dnt0606.htm.
13. If the person was ever on probation, contact the probation department in the city where that person was placed on probation.
14. Child support cases only: If you receive welfare benefits, contact the district attorney's office to seek help in locating the person.
15. Automobile accidents only: your attorney can request address information from the DMV.
16. Hire a private investigator.

2. Finding Businesses

Here are some steps you can take to search for businesses and their agents for service of process.

1. Check www.yellowpages.com or other free online directories. Some suggested sites are listed below under "Websites and Online Databases." Call telephone information (411).
2. If the business is a corporation (Inc. or Corp.), limited liability company (LLC), or limited partnership (LP), and does business in California, it should have a listing at the California Secretary of State's website: kepler.sos.ca.gov/. This listing will contain the entity's address of record and the name and address of its designated agent for service of process. Find other states' Secretary of State at www.e-secretaryofstate.com/.
3. You may be able to get information on any type of business from the city or county clerk where it is located. Ask about "FBN" (fictitious business name) or "DBA" (doing business

as) listings, or business licenses. Sometimes this information is available on the city or county website.

4. Search business directories, industry, or trade associations, and other business resources. Like many public libraries, the Sacramento Public Library offers free access to excellent "Business & Finance" databases at the library or from anywhere with your SPL library card (www.saclibrary.org/Research/). "Business Source Complete" is particularly helpful for location and contact information.
5. If the business itself has a website, search it for contact information for its headquarters, officers, or owners. You may find this under "contact us," "about us," "staff directory," or a site map. If this is not helpful, try using the "Whois" service to see who owns the website. Visit www.internic.net/whois.html to search by typing in the website address (URL) for contact and address information.
6. Publicly held companies (companies that sell stock to the public) must file reports and disclosures with the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC). These filings can have a information including contacts, reports on significant litigation, and more. You can search this information at the SEC's EDGAR (Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis and Retrieval) site, www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml, or the easier-to-use website www.secinfo.com.
7. If the company has federally-registered trademarks or patents, contacts should be available in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's database, www.uspto.gov. Trademarks can also be registered in individual states, but most do not offer online searches.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

1. Self Help and General Books

How to Find Out Anything ZA 3075 .M33 (Self Help)
This book includes information on the "deep web" (online resources which are open to the public but not listed in major search engines) as well as tips for standard search engines like Google. Chapter 7 focuses on finding people, while Chapter 8 focuses on finding businesses.

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Private Investigating KF 2042. D48 B76 (Self Help)
Chapters 4-8 discuss "skip tracing," or finding people who have dropped out of sight, including the use of public records, courthouse records, and for-pay databases. Chapter 22, "The Diligent Search: Adoption and Estates," discusses requirements for service by publication, problems with the requirements, and possible approaches to fulfilling them. While the book is aimed at private investigators, non-PIs can also benefit.

2. Specialized Books

The Cybersleuth's Guide to the Internet: Conducting Effective and Free Investigative & Legal Research on the Web KF 242 .A1 L481
Revised in 2014, this book covers more than just people-finding, but Chapter 7 focuses on "Free Investigative Research Resources: To Locate and Background People," and chapters 8 and 9 cover finding experts and finding legal professionals.

Find Info Like a Pro: Mining the Internet's Publicly Available Resources for Investigative Research KF 242 .A1 L4785
Includes chapters on finding people, finding phone numbers and addresses, using online communities and social networking site for research, and more. The book may be slightly dated, but most of the resources discussed are still helpful. Available CD includes clickable links to all sites contained in the book.

Find Info Like a Pro: Mining the Internet's Public Records for Investigative Research

KF 242 .A1 L48

Addresses public records, including licenses, criminal and civil case records, liens and assets, and using SEC records. Many useful websites (free, free-with-registration, and fee-based) are detailed and instructions on how to use them are provided. The book may be slightly dated, but most of the resources discussed are still helpful. Available CD includes clickable links to all sites contained in the book.

The Sourcebook to Public Record Information: The Comprehensive Guide to County, State, & Federal Public Records Sources JK 468 .P76 S693 (Ref Desk)
The first section has a very useful discussion of what types of records may be useful in researching businesses and individuals; guidelines for using public records; and methods of accessing them. The rest of the book contains contact information and details for public offices throughout the U.S., sometimes including practical tips not available online.

WEBSITES AND ONLINE DATABASES

1. Telephone Directories

These sites let you look up names, addresses, and phone numbers. If the person is listed, the information is provided on the results screen, without additional clicks or required payment. Most also include reverse directories, which let you search by phone number. They often provide inconsistent results; try more than one. Here are a few to start with:

Whitepages.com
www.whitepages.com
Phone and address listings for people and businesses, including reverse phone number search, neighbor search, and other tools.

Yellow Pages.com
http://www.yellowpages.com (for businesses)
http://www.yellowpages.com/whitepages (for people)
This site, which gets its information from a pay site (Intellius), also provides phone and address listings. It is not associated with Whitepages.com and can provide different or additional information.

Reverse Phone Directory.com
www.reversephonedirectory.com
Offers a “reverse directory” – if you know the number, it can tell you who owns it. Mostly contains landlines, and does not contain unlisted numbers. Also has a “People Search” option which can get you names, addresses, and phone numbers if you have the person’s first name, last name, and state.

2. "People Search" Sites and Databases

More than just addresses and phone numbers, many of these sites offer prior residences, names of relatives or neighbors, news articles, social media profiles, and the like, which can help confirm or reject a potential match. Generally these sites offer limited information for free, then offer to sell you "full reports." The company behind the reports is usually Intellius, which even owns some of the "free" sites on this list. Instead of buying, try several different sites; they often have different information available, and together they may provide a fairly complete picture. Be sure to try searching for alternate names, nicknames, and email addresses.

Zabasearch
www.zabasearch.com/
This site offers fairly minimal information for free: frequently a full address and phone number. Several links offer more detailed information, which turns out to be a paid report from Intellius.

Peoplefinder.com
www.peoplefinder.com
This site also frequently has a full address and phone number. Clicking the "premium details" links at the right will often get you additional information, such as age, relatives, companies worked for, and previous cities of residence (although not street addresses or phone numbers). Additional information is available from Intellius for a fee.

Pipl
www.pipl.com/
Full addresses and phone numbers are often available, although you may need to look carefully at the list of "places" to find the address. Former residences, age, relatives, and other information may also be listed. Pipl supports searching by name, username, phone number, and email. "Sponsored links" take you to various pay-for-service sites.

Spokeo
www.spokeo.com
Free searches will turn up current and prior residence locations, partial phone numbers, and general information about birth date, relatives, and more. For a modest fee, Spokeo provides a one-stop place to search 70+ social websites, including blogging, dating, music and video, location review sites like Yelp, and professional community sites. Useful features include the ability to search by username or email address as well as name, phone number, and physical address.

3. Public Records

These resources gather links to free public records databases, such as real property ownership, licensing agencies, and court and jail records. Some also offer paid links to pay services:

Public Record Searches (California state and local agencies)
www.ca.gov/onlineservices/os_government_records.html

Search Systems www.searchsystems.net/

Public Records Free Directory http://publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/

Portico indorgs.virginia.edu/portico

BRB Publications www.brbpub.com/free-public-records

Black Book Online www.blackbookonline.info

Genealogy Resources

Genealogy sites collect and publish public records to help people search for their ancestors. Some of these have excellent resources for living people, as well. One particularly useful (and completely free) site is FamilyTreeNow (www.familytreenow.com). Search by name, then narrow to "Living Persons." ("Death Records" can be helpful too, to determine if your person has passed away.) Click on all results that look like your person; they often have different information.

4. Social Sites

Any number of social networking sites can be useful in locating a missing person. If you are looking for a person with a strong interest in something, try specialty sites such as Café Mom, Dogster, DeviantArt, and the like. MySpace has a large independent music following.

Here are three social sites that may be particularly helpful:

Adoption Search & Reunion
reunion.adoption.com/
Registry for birth parents and adoptees wishing to find each other, resources and information on issues facing people searching for birth families or biological children, and forums for help and advice.

Classmates.com - Find High School Friends, Plan Reunions
www.classmates.com/
Includes elementary schools and colleges as well as high schools. You must register to use the website, and some features, like viewing people's locations, reading bulletin board notes, and reviewing yearbooks, require a subscription.

Facebook
www.facebook.com
Hundreds of millions of people are listed on Facebook. Many share location information, friend lists, and other information that can help locate them.

5. Business Information

Subscription (free with Sacramento Public Library card):

Business & Financial Research
www.saclibrary.org/Research/ (Click on "Business & Finance")
"Business Source Complete" is a good resource for finding company executives and locations as well as whether a company is a subsidiary of another company. The Morningstar and "Reference USA" company listings can also help you find profiles, including the names and contact information for officers, directors, and agents. Information in the different databases may be different, so use several.

Coordinated Legal Technologies
www.coordinatedlegal.com/index.html
This site gathers web sites offering governmental data and other reference information. Particularly useful for locating companies are the California (and nationwide) county online databases, fictitious

business name listings, and the Professional Licensing Lookups page, which offers navigation links to occupational and professional licensing and regulation lookups at various states across the country.

CrocTail
http://croctail.corpwatch.org/
A search engine dedicated to identifying subsidiary relationships between corporations (both US and foreign), based on SEC filings.

Hoovers
hoovers.com
Information on large companies, including top management, summary of business, and competitors. Basic information is free, but details require a subscription or purchase.

Manta
www.manta.com
Smaller companies and stores are listed here, along with top contacts, news, and reports (may require payment). This is a good resource for finding information on local businesses.

SECInfo.com
www.secinfo.com
Pulls information from the Securities & Exchange Commission's EDGAR site (www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml) and presents it in more easily analyzed form. Information on all publicly traded companies in the United States, including executives, contact information, and much more.

FOR MORE RESEARCH: ONLINE GUIDES

Corporate Research Project: Dirt Diggers Digest Guide to Strategic Corporate Research
http://corp-research.org/dddresearchguide
Information on how to find corporate information; how to research corporate relationships such as parent corporations, officers, and customers; and how to investigate corporate actions, including litigation, lobbying, and executive compensation.

Cyndi's List: Finding People
www.cyndislist.com/finding.htm
Lists many resources for finding people online. Cyndi's List is primarily a genealogy site, but this page lists resources for finding living people.

Free People Search Sites: The Best on the Web
websearch.about.com/od/freepeoplesearchsites/p/Free-People-Search-Sites-The-Best-On-The-Web.htm
From About.com: free resources that can help you find people and businesses online.

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