

ACAB

The Chicago Police reportedly bought secret drones using drug money

Nope, that's not an exaggeration.

The cops are at it again. Police in Chicago have been secretly testing a full drone program by using untraceable cash taken during drug raids, according to [a report from the *Chicago Sun-Times*](#) (h/t [Gizmodo](#)). That doesn't seem sketchy at all.

The *Sun-Times* was privy to an email sent by Karen Conway, Chicago PD's director of police research and development, last summer (the emails leaked as part of [a huge hack last month](#)). Conway says explicitly in the email that the department's counter-terrorism bureau "utilized 1505 funds for a pilot Drone program that operates within the parameters of current laws."

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Those 1505 funds are forfeiture proceeds: assets seized during criminal investigations. As such, that cash is not included in the police department's official budget and is, for all intents and purposes, untraceable. Unless you're willing to put that information in an email, apparently.

The Chicago Police Department has a long history of [uncouth law enforcement practices](#), so it's not exactly shocking that it's going to such lengths again. Neither is it surprising that the department is reportedly showing little to no remorse about it.

UNABASHED SECRECY — The Chicago Police says its secret drone program was limited in use to take crime scene photos and work on terrorism-related investigations. These cases are both allowed by Chicago law, despite the city's drone restrictions being generally tight.

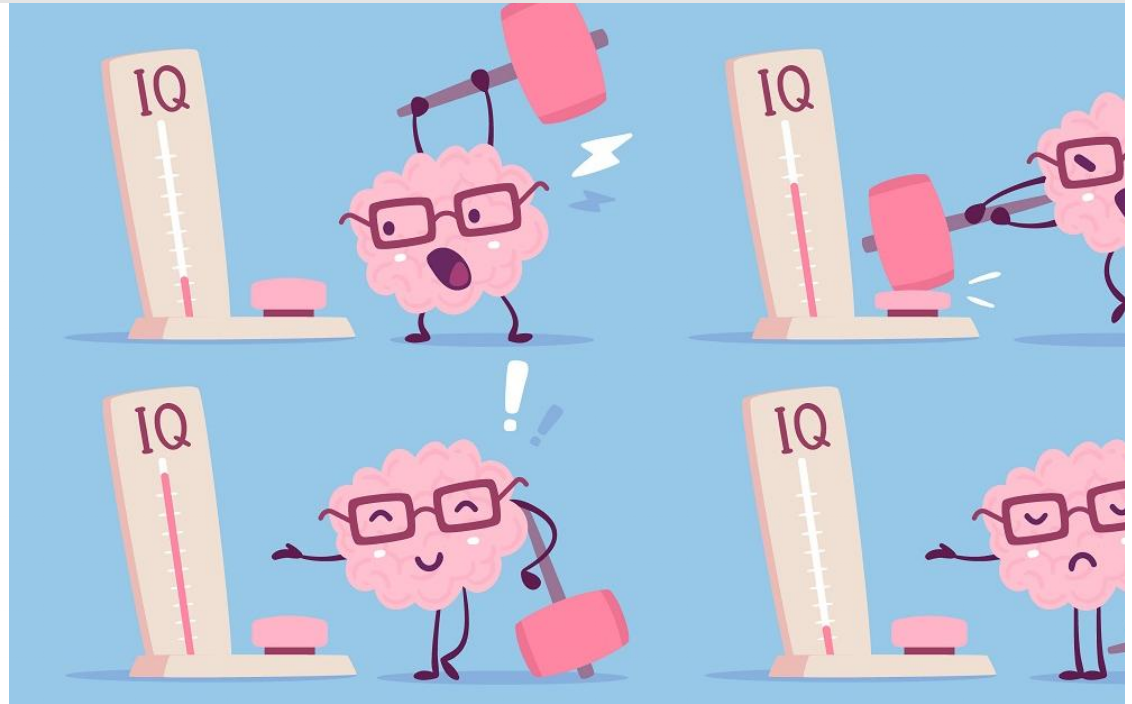
And yet the department still hid its drone program, going as far as to use that off-the-books cash — at least \$26,000 of it, according to the leaked emails.

When asked about the program, the Chicago Police told the *Sun-Times* that it investigates "every tool available when it comes to maintaining public safety and actively searches for innovative opportunities." The department's spokesperson did not explicitly mention drones.

MORE THAN A TREND — The Illinois chapter of the ACLU is understandably

...The Illinois chapter of the ACLU is understandably concerned about the Chicago PD's under-the-table drone dealings. A spokesperson for the chapter told the *Sun-Times* that the emails show Chicago "continues to pursue the invasive technologies without any public disclosure, oversight, or publicly adopted privacy policies."

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The real concern here is that, by using unofficial funds and not disclosing the program, the Chicago Police could easily use that technology for unsavory surveillance purposes. This is quickly becoming the norm [in police departments across the United States](#). This pattern of investing in invasive technology would be

terrifying enough; it's made more so by [the overwhelming secrecy with which police operate these programs](#). If you want to buy a few drones to take aerial crime scene photos, sure, go right ahead — but if that's all you're using the drones for, why hide it?

Maybe the Chicago PD will learn a useful lesson about transparency through this leak. But then again: [even transparency, for police departments, isn't always what it seems](#).

Chris Stokel-Walker

Sep. 15, 2022

MARKETING

why it's so tough to be a brand on

BeReal

Chipotle, Sour Patch Kids, and e.l.f. are early adopters, but the spontaneous nature of the app can make for an awkward fit.

On July 25, a handful of people milled about New York's Times Square, constantly checking their phones and glancing up at the huge digital billboard on the Nasdaq building on the corner of 7th Ave. and West 43rd St.

They weren't the usual tourists, but representatives of Chipotle's social media team.

On the billboard, a Chipotle ad exhorted people to “Buy the Dip. Eat the Dip” — a campaign advertising a contest to win free cryptocurrency that could, in turn, be used to buy food at the restaurant chain’s outlets. “We knew that day we wanted to showcase the billboard,” says Neiv Toledano, social media manager at Chipotle. “We had the team out at Times Square, getting ready to take the photo and snap that moment.”

 Chipotle

But the team had to wait, because the snap was for BeReal, the French social media app that encourages people worldwide to take a photo during the same two-minute window. Sure enough, when the notification came through, the Chipotle crew took the picture of the billboard, and posted it to followers on the app, which has been [downloaded 41 million times](#) this year alone. (BeReal's early success hasn't gone unnoticed: Today, [TikTok announced its clone](#) of BeReal's features, called TikTok Now.)

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The Times Square billboard reveal was a major moment for the brand, which is **far from the only company** to hop on to the buzzy app. Sour Patch Kids have played with the concept of one of its sugar-coated gummies taking the photos. (BeReal shows both front-facing and rear-facing images.) Pac-Sun chose to **present real people having fun** as part of its branding on the app. And e.l.f. Beauty's BeReal offers **supposedly unfiltered insights** into what happens at the company's headquarters.

In April, Chipotle noticed that BeReal was becoming popular, and decided to monitor how users posted before leaping in the following month. "The way we think about social media is through this lens of culture hunting. We're constantly looking to see where consumers are and thinking about how we can engage our community," says Chipotle's vice president of digital marketing and off-premise, Tressie Lieberman.

"We think about each individual platform and the creative

capabilities it has, and will customize our content based off that platform,” Lieberman continues. “Obviously, BeReal is very unique: It was about showing that true view into the brand.”

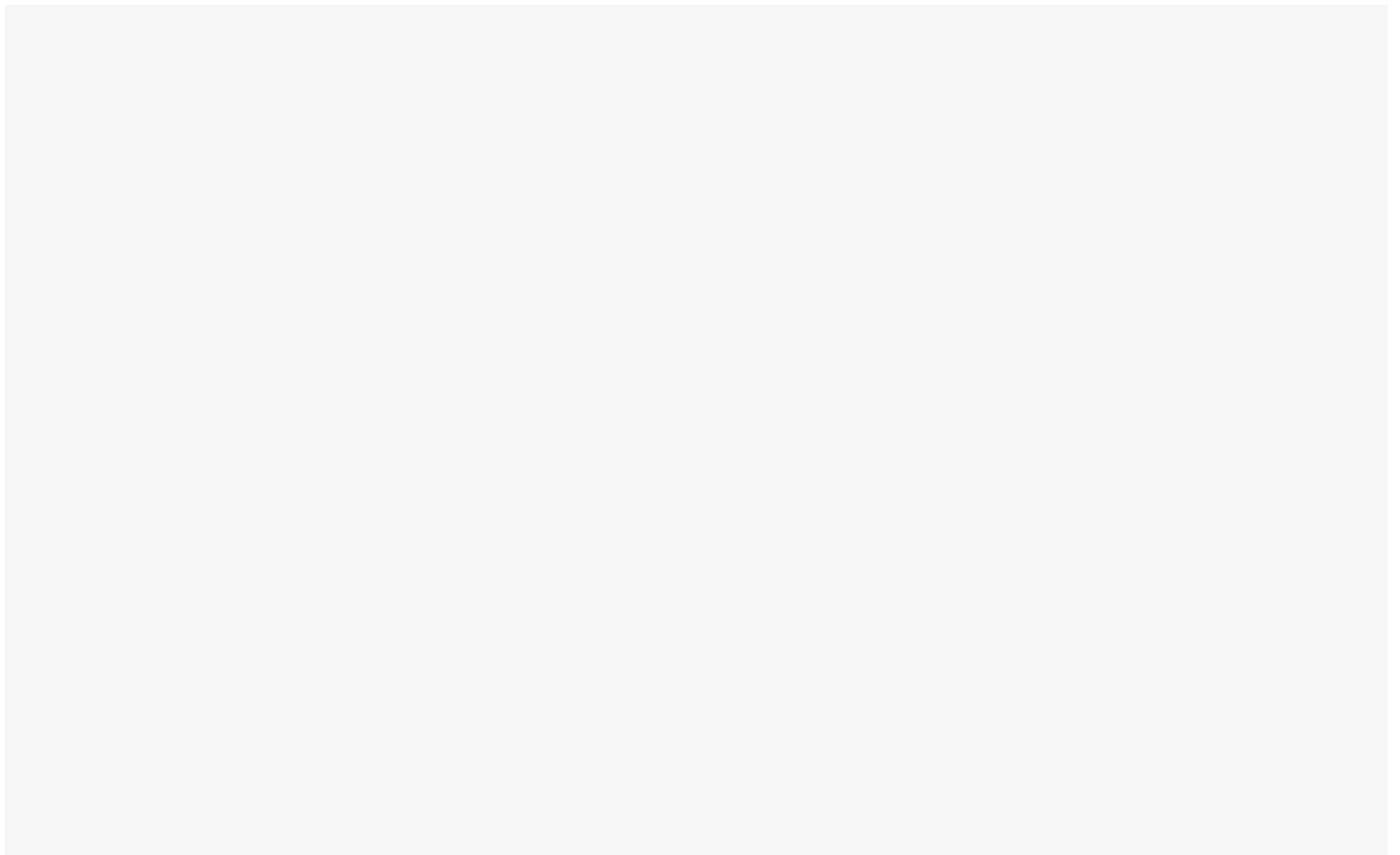
Whether being on BeReal is a wise move for most brands is up for debate. “The big thing I keep going back to is it’s hard to tell if BeReal is here to stay, like TikTok was a few years ago, or if it’s just going to be a fad app that disappears in the next couple of months and doesn’t pick up momentum,” says Nathan Allebach, creative director at Allebach Communications and formerly the voice behind [Steak-umm’s distinctive social media presence](#). “Right now, brands and celebrities are in the feeling-out process of determining if this has staying power.”

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That involves tiptoeing slowly into the space. Allebach points to

one of Chipotle's advertising concepts on BeReal, in which the company featured a still image with a promotional code advertising the product. "You could tell it was already set up," he says. "But for anything more elaborate, anything that requires more involvement or mascots or anything complex, the whole thing is really not feasible."

Toledano admits that Chipotle's initial launch on BeReal had plenty of planning involved. "The week [in late May] we dropped the codes, we were ready," she says. Chipotle had food cooked and redemption codes written on napkins. "We really dedicated that entire week to doing the Chipotle drops on the platform," says Toledano.





 Chipotle

Allebach has [previously pointed out](#) the labor conditions for social media managers are not the most conducive to a good lifestyle. "Social media managers are already expected to be on-call all throughout the week, and sometimes even the weekends," he says. "For this content to work, you really have to be planning every day or couple of days a certain look or

setting you're ready to go with — presumably for small returns.”

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You're also expecting social media managers in charge of a brand's BeReal account to be on-call constantly, ready to drop everything whether they're in the middle of a meal or a bathroom break, in order to post to the app. (BeReal can ping a notification at any time during people's waking hours, as determined by time zone.)

“But the reality of the app is there is some forgiveness with the notification,” Toledano says. (BeReal allows users to post outside the 120-second window, albeit with a tag that indicates that they were late.) She adds that Chipotle's social media team tries to use BeReal in the same way any other user would.

But the same things that make BeReal so interesting for everyday users — the lack of control, the immediacy, the rawness — are aspects that social media marketing, with its layers of bureaucracy, tends to abhor.



“LOGISTICALLY,
BeReal seems like a
NIGHTMARE to deal
with, especially for
SMALLER brands.”



“The whole point of the app is to have fun and be transparent,” says Lieberman. “It doesn’t have to be a perfect photo.” That said, she does admit the images posted on BeReal are checked over by a colleague before posting. “That’s something we’re comfortable with because we have built the process,” says Lieberman. “We’re pretty seamless when it comes to creating

the content, then getting it out there.”

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While conglomerates may feel comfortable experimenting to see if they can turn a BeReal presence into real bucks, Allebach is less sure that it’s the future for the little guys. “Logistically, BeReal seems like a nightmare to deal with,” he says, “especially for smaller brands.”

For now though, there is the halo effect of being among the first brands on a relatively new platform. And, as Allebach points out, it’s working. After all, *Input* is writing about Chipotle, providing it with “earned media,” i.e., unpaid coverage.

“Brands are trying to get caught up in that initial groundswell,”

Allebach says. "But if we talk four to five months from now, I'm not so sure it'll still be hot as it is right now."

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