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Rob Fried: My Journey From Digital Forensics Expert To Top PI

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By Robert B. Fried, Senior Vice President, [Sandline Discovery LLC](#)

Many years ago, while in philosophy class, I learned about techne — the concept that humans possess a variety of knowledge. We each eventually discover our skill sets and follow a career path in a specific field. Along the way, through our interactions with others, our skills may be beneficial within other industries. This could lead to many unique opportunities—which has been the case for me.

Becoming a Licensed Private Investigator

Over two decades ago, I had attained an undergraduate and a graduate degree in Forensic Science. When I began my career in digital forensics, I had never thought that I would become a licensed private investigator. I soon learned that although I worked as a consultant in New York, some states require digital forensic practitioners to be licensed private investigators. Diving into things deeper—each state is unique and may or may not have a specific stance on the topic. However, over time, because of the work I performed on behalf of clients in Michigan, New York, and South Carolina, I had attained and have since maintained those licenses.

Having the license allowed me to comply with the laws in the States where I was doing work. However, it was not until I joined professional organizations that cater to licensed private investigators that I networked with others in the industry. As of today, I am an “active” member of a handful of organizations, attending events and contributing to listservs. When attending events, especially those which are in-person, there is an emphasis on introducing yourself to other attendees. Even though some of us may know each other from previous meetings, it allows everyone to connect or re-connect and hear about our respective backgrounds.

I never knew how diversified an industry can be! I have met private investigators from all walks of life. For example, some are former law enforcement officers, and others

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are lawyers. Each investigator has different expertise, including but certainly not limited to background checks, surveillance, missing persons, executive protection, process servicing, asset search and recovery, and bug sweeping. Despite the varied expertise, investigators all have a primary goal—to gather information.

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As a digital forensic practitioner, my role is to identify, preserve, collect, and examine electronic evidence. Today, technology is so embedded in our daily lives that almost everyone interacts with electronic devices or has a digital footprint. It should be of no surprise that electronic evidence plays a crucial role in many of today’s investigations —public and private. For example, I have handled cases involving extracting data from a medical device, unlocking a mobile device belonging to a decedent involved in a vehicle accident, and examining metadata from video recordings. Beyond assisting my fellow investigators with casework, I have also been able to provide thought leadership via the educational content that I have compiled.

Sharing Knowledge Across Industries

When I began my career in digital forensics, I was a Computer Crime Specialist for the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C). In that role, I was fortunate to develop and instruct basic and advanced data recovery courses to local, state, and federal law enforcement personnel. Since then, teaching has been close to my heart—I would even venture to say that it has become part of my digital DNA! Since 2020, I have been a contributing author for [Professional Investigator Magazine](#) (“PI Magazine”). In each issue, I have written articles on topics related to digital forensics, eDiscovery, and cybersecurity. I have contributed articles and have presented on topics related to digital forensics for several of the professional investigator organizations.

The positive response to my writing and presentations motivated me to find additional ways to share knowledge with others. The goal in each is to provide fellow digital forensic practitioners, eDiscovery professionals and private investigators with what they need to know, and the questions they need to ask when encountering electronic evidence in matters involving a litigation or an investigation. It’s a great feeling to know that content I have created is a valuable resource for my peers across several industries.

Being a digital forensic practitioner and a private investigator is rewarding. It has allowed me to build rapport with individuals from different industries. I have learned early on that although humans possess a variety of knowledge, we cannot all be experts in everything. It is important for us to know our strengths and weaknesses, and when to call upon other experts.

Someone referred a recent case involving unusual activity on a mobile device to me. While I have experience examining devices for malware and such, in discussing the scope further, the conversation with the parties had shifted to potentially analyzing radio frequencies. Although this type of analysis was outside my area of expertise, I know an investigator with expertise in the analysis of data from cell towers and radio frequencies! I let the parties know and introduced my fellow investigator—everyone appreciated the connection!

We really get more back when we give. Since becoming a licensed private investigator in 2015, I have been fortunate to foster meaningful connections and lead interesting



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investigations. The digital forensics, eDiscovery, and private investigator industries have supported and embraced the educational content that I have shared.

Top Professional Investigators of 2024

I was incredibly honored to learn that PI Magazine had named me one of the Top Professional Investigators of 2024 in their November/December issue. This special recognition, which I am privileged to share with a select group of highly talented investigators, is something that I am proud of. I hope to continue to positively contribute to the industry and look forward to collaborating with those in my professional network.



About the Author

Robert B. Fried is a seasoned expert and industry thought leader, with over twenty-two years of experience performing data collections and forensic investigations of electronic evidence. He has held senior leadership positions for the digital forensics practices at global professional services firms. Additionally, Robert was a Computer Crime Specialist at the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C), where he developed and instructed computer forensic and investigative training courses for federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

He attained a BS and MS in Forensic Science, and certificates in Law Enforcement Science, Computer Forensic Investigation, and Information Protection and Security from the University of New Haven. Robert holds and actively maintains the following industry certifications: ACE, CFCE, EnCE, GCFA, and C4 CBP. He is a licensed PI in Michigan, New York, and South Carolina. Robert serves on the Board of Advisors for the Masters in Investigations program at the University of New Haven, and the Global Advisory Board for EC-Council's CHFI certification.

Often sought after for his uncanny ability to convey forensics related topics, Robert is a frequent speaker at industry events, a featured guest on industry podcasts and has been published in several professional publications. He is the author of PI Magazine's Cybersluething Department, where he shares insightful content on topics relating to digital forensics, eDiscovery, data privacy, and cybersecurity. Robert is also the author of the books, Forensic Data Collections 2.0: The Guide for Defensible & Efficient Processes (2022), Forensic Data Collections 2.0: A Selection of Trusted Digital



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