



Jurisprudence Section – 2009

E13 YouTube, Facebook, Chat Rooms, and Blogs: A Fertile Classroom for Illicit Activities

Susan G. Zucker, PhD, National Clearinghouse for Science, Technology and the Law at Stetson University, 1401 61st Street South, Gulfport, FL 33707; and Vahid Majidi, PhD*, Federal Bureau Investigation, 935 Pennsylvania Avenue North West, Washington, DC, DC 20535*

After attending this presentation, attendees will: (1) study the relationship between national security, criminal activity, and social networks on the internet, (2) raise awareness of the internet's impact on national security with regard to crime and terrorism, (3) comprehend the impact of internet technologies on government surveillance techniques, and (4) appreciate how technology can assist governments in apprehending criminals and terrorists online.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by raising awareness of the importance of internet surveillance to curtail criminal and terrorist activity worldwide. Attendees will see the connection between social networks on the internet and national security and criminal activity, comprehend the impact of the internet on government surveillance, and relate the development of new internet technologies with the need for improved national security surveillance techniques.

After attending this session, participants will know about current proliferation of tools, technologies, and methodologies for criminal activities on the internet. Conversely, these same tools can be used to determine the goals, methodologies, and/or intent of perpetrators and help law enforcement officials identify potential targets. This presentation will inform and complement the theme "Future of Forensics" by discussing internet security in response to developing social networks.

In the past, complex approaches used by sophisticated criminals were passed on by old fashioned apprenticeship. Interested individuals had to put themselves in jeopardy to obtain information and learn about these trades. Today, with the abundance of instruction on the internet, anyone can learn the fundamentals of sophisticated crimes at minimal risk and in nearly complete anonymity. All one needs is a computer terminal with an internet connection. For example, even Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has his own blog.

Another unintended consequence of internet platforms such as YouTube, is the enhancement of law enforcement capabilities by examining video clips uploaded from cell phones. In fact, several investigations have been initiated based on potential volitions captured by people near a crime scene, recording ongoing activities with their cell phones. Citizens Media describes the phenomenon of people taking pictures with their cell phones and posting them on the internet, most commonly on YouTube. Two examples include the recent discovery made with the assistance of video footage of two L.A. police officers improperly treating an arrestee and a child who was filmed while supposedly being given Ecstasy.

Lastly, the content of these internet social networking sites, by themselves, can be used as potential evidence of crimes or intent. Over the past few years, local law enforcement and the U.S. government have been able to analyze the content of posted materials and arrive at attributing information yielding identification and location of perpetrators.

The speed of new technology implementation is extremely rapid and the rate of public acceptance of these new tools is well aligned with the development phase. As such, the law enforcement and U.S. government community is faced with a significant challenge when looking to use these upcoming social networking venues. Furthermore, the technical and legal bases that were used for earlier version of deployed technologies may not be compatible with the next generation of internet infrastructure. These networks, which include Facebook, YouTube, Second Life, blogs, and secure web-based e-mail, didn't exist five years ago but are vehicles studied to identify possible illegal activities.

Wikipedia's open source technology has been used to create Intellipedia, an online system for collaborative data sharing used by the U.S. intelligence community (IC). A-Space, the web-based portal that houses Intellipedia, was created to assist the intelligence community with information sharing. It will eventually include wikis, blogs, social networking, RSS feeds, collaborative web-based word processing, mash-ups, and content tagging.

Social Networks, FBI CIA, YouTube