



modern trends  
in the  
**surveillance**  
&  
**investigative**  
**industry**

By: Brad Friesen

"WE ARE  
ALWAYS PAID  
FOR OUR  
SUSPICIONS BY  
FINDING  
WHAT  
WE SUSPECT."

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Anyone who's been in the investigative and surveillance industry for the past ten to fifteen years can tell you that several significant changes have occurred in regard to the technological aspect of the industry. Not long ago, a videotape obtained by investigators in the field was captured on bulky High Fidelity. The images would then be recorded on a VCR that was connected to the hi-fi by video cables. ▶



Not only was the VCR connected to the hi-fi, there were also cables connected to a monitor to allow the investigator to see what the camera was capturing. At that time, there were no rechargeable batteries or enough cigarette outlets to power the equipment, so marine batteries were often used for a power source. Needless to say cables and cords were often unplugged with the slightest movement. Keep in mind, if the subject was to depart the area, you were expected to pursue.

Since the time of the hi-fi and VCR era, significant strides have been made, particularly with the size of the video equipment. Today, the most common and useful form of video recording is digital video. Not only is the size of the video camera significantly smaller; the quality of the video is exceptional. Compared to VHS recorders, the mini DV cameras are 1/5 the size of VHS and the cassette tapes are approximately 1/10 the size of VHS. Because of the smaller video camera, investigators are allowed to move from location to location inside surveillance vehicles without the size of the video cameras becoming a distraction.

With the surveillance industry becoming more popular to the everyday person, as well as to the individuals who are the target of the surveillance, miniature video cameras/hidden body-worn video equipment is a necessity to remain inconspicuous. These types of video cameras come in the forms of cell phones, pagers, pocket organizers, neckties, baseball caps, wristwatches and many other forms. Some have transmitters to transmit the video to a remote recording source and others record the video on memory discs that are often no larger than a paper clip. These devices allow investigators to sit next to a subject in a restaurant, nightclub or at a sporting event without them being aware that their movements are being digitally recorded. This equipment is necessary to stay one step ahead of the individuals whose injury(s) are not legitimate and who seek to gain financially.

In a recent surveillance where body-worn equipment was used, a subject was followed around inside a grocery store and videotaped as he lifted two 40 lb. bags of charcoal from the bottom shelf into his grocery cart. As the subject neared the check out, the investigator exited the store and was in position to videotape the subject as he lifted the charcoal from his cart into the back of his S.U.V.

Another technological stride made in the surveillance industry has been the concept of remote-unmanned video equipment that allows investigators in the field to have surveillance conducted without their presence. These devices range from stuffed animals to a variety of different car accessories that contain remote hidden video equipment. The hidden camera is placed on the dash or in the rear window of a parked car in front of the designated location. The video is then transmitted to an investigator at a remote location who is monitoring the individual's actions. Because of this type of surveillance, the individual who is the target will not have reason to believe he/she is being watched. This will also give the investigator the advantage when pursuit is involved, since the subject will not be followed from the location of departure.

In the investigation field where certain information can be priceless, the evolvement and accessibility of nationwide database companies are making the trip to the local courthouse a thing of the past. Of course there will always be certain documents and data that will not be found anywhere but at a courthouse. Information such as an unlisted phone number, a monthly phone bill, an individual's accounts and balances, credit card statements, criminal history, death records and more may now be found via other means despite the fact that this type of information is not accessible to the general public.

Overall, while computers and databases are a useful tool to aid investigators, nothing can

replace the experienced, savvy investigator who can go out into the field and gather the information. And no database can ever perform the tasks of interviewing a neighbor, tracking down a witness, or taking a face-to-face recorded statement.