

# Skip-Tracing Best Practices

Alex Price

Greetings from the great state of Alabama: ROLL TIDE!

Since my retirement from active skip-tracing 8 years ago, I now have the opportunity to sit back and observe the industry closely. Since I've taken on a teaching and training role, reaching a new generation of Skip-Tracers with MasterFiles, I see much talk and concern on the topic of best practices and compliance. To the late-comers I say, "Welcome to the party!" To those of you who have spent an entire career making sure that your company and your team are well-trained and educated in the local, state and federal regulations, this subject is nothing new. The organizations that have always advocated methods to maintain compliance typically seem to rise above the rest, survive, and prosper even in the tough economic times of today.

In this edition of my blog I would like to shed more light on the sometimes neglected "Skip-Tracer". In any operation, they can be one of your greatest assets: making you a profit and/or reducing your losses. Or they can be detrimental to your bottom line.

A true Skip-Tracer in 2012 has to be an expert on many things—human nature, interviewing skills understanding the complex world of data, and much more. Yet I believe that the most valuable asset that they can bring to their profession is a working understanding of all the regulations that a Skip-tracer must function within. We all know that skip-tracers are often pushed into situations which have them sacrificing fundamental good practices in the quest for rapid results. When they're being told to, "**Find that Skip by any means necessary; I don't care what it costs!**", a simple slip-up on third-party disclosure, an unconscious violation of GLB, FDCPA, FCRA, or a careless disregard for the Pre-Text Act is not unheard of. Yet it can come with tens of thousands in fines and possible jail time.

Today a Tracer must juggle legal compliance with the ability to locate a human being who does not want to be found. Skip-tracers often find themselves navigating mine-fields of regulations, risking lawsuits from debtors, fines from governmental regulators and the possibility of a criminal record.

Given the range of risks, and the quagmire of legalities, it is usually impossible to cover the training needed at a once-a-year conference event; and even if attempted, most of the time it is the owner or manager who attends and not the person performing the task. It is for this reason that Leedom Group and NCM 20 Groups have been so invaluable in the auto finance arena. I tip my hat to Mr. Ron Brown, who has started the 20 Group process within the collateral recovery industry. His Eagle Group provides monthly meetings, conference calls, sharing of information and much more. They cover everything needed to be successful in today's environment.

The American Recovery Association, in partnership with the Recovery Industry Services Company (RISC), have started online webinars to help their members get into, and stay in compliance with all the regulations. Leaders from both of these esteemed organizations understand the value of education and training for not just an owner or manager, but for everyone employed within the company.

It is only with this type of forward thinking that we, as an industry, will prosper and stand head and shoulders above all others as we meet the challenges, and the rewards, to come in the months and years ahead.

For 27 some-odd years I have been a proud skip-tracer, and nothing but a skip-tracer. It is all I have done or ever wanted to do, and has been the most rewarding experience of my life. The honor comes through knowing the men and women of the industry that have crossed my path over the years, and who have graciously mentored me from the age of 24 or 25 years old to today. In many cases they have been the legends of the art of skip-tracing, and the auto finance, law enforcement and bail enforcement industries.

After seeing the gap in training for the average skip-tracer I felt compelled to write the **Skip-Tracers National Certification Program** the only accredited certification program in the U.S. for the Tracer at any stage of their career, in my effort to equip the individual tracer with everything they need to be a success and be in full compliance at the same time. We all can agree that the days of the wild west are far behind us and will not return. My wish is for all the associations to band together, if for nothing else, then for education and compliance.

We all deal with sensitive data in our day-to-day activities—from customer applications, to internal files to data retrieved from the net. We are all charged to be good stewards of this data, and if we aren't we can lose that privilege. Being without access to data in today's world would make our jobs nearly impossible.

The following cases are perfect examples of some horror stories I have heard during my travels of how failing to protect the data can be a costly mistake. In one case a debtor's file was left in a repossessed vehicle. When the lending institution gave the car back to the debtor for payments, the car owner found the file containing her own sensitive data carelessly abandoned inside the vehicle. The car owner filed suit for invasion of privacy, and the business owner ended up having to pay off the debtor's auto to settle.

In another case a bondsman terminated an employee who lacked morals but possessed a good memory. She remembered to take her old login and password with her to her new job at the competitor's business. Because the previous employer had failed to terminate the ex-employee's access, she racked up enough usage to stick her former boss for a six thousand dollar bill.

Each of these expensive mistakes could have been prevented by having some simple office security policies in place, which would not only enhance the daily functions of a business, but also allow the business owner a better night's sleep!

Below are just some examples of the policies and procedures that are warranted by the sensitive (and costly) nature of protected data:

- Formal and documented security policies, standards, plans and procedures
- Written policy or standard regarding data privacy (signed by all staff members)
- Internet access and use policy
- Encryption policy and standards
- Security incident management policy
- Policies for managing external communication devices and removable media
- Restrict access to information and technology to your staffs job function
- Establish a process for granting and documenting system access, including but not limited to access for third parties and remote access.
- Disable user names and passwords associated with employees that are terminated or transferred.
- Prevent removing secure information or related assets (storage media, hardware) from the premises.
- Equip Security Cameras to cover inside and outside doors and areas associated with access to secured data
- Electronically alarm all doors and/or windows

Until Next Time....



Alex Price is a nationally-recognized expert on the Art of Skip Tracing. Currently he is the Executive Vice President for MasterFiles and author of Skip Tracers National Certification Program, The Florida Records Guide, The Military Installations Guide and blogger with over 25+ years of experience in skip-tracing, collections and public speaking.

Alex Price has become a highly sought-after speaker in the auto recovery, bail enforcement and financial service industries. He combines old school skip-tracing methods with new age cyber-tracking technology to equip attendees with tools that he gained through invaluable experience. He balances the hard facts about skips with just the right amount of humor and a touch of southern charm.

Here are some of his other affiliations and qualifications:

- In 2010 was honored as the only skip-tracer ever admitted as a honorary member of the American Recovery Association (ARA)
- The only skip-tracer to have achieved the Certified Asset Recovery Specialist (CARS) Certification
- The only skip-tracer accepted for membership to Time Finance Adjusters (TFA)—where he also served as a member of the Advisory Board
- Member of Allied Adjusters.
- Served as a member of the Advisory Board for the Florida Association of Licensed Recovery Agents (FALRA)
- Instructor for state of Oklahoma, Tennessee and Arkansas Bail Enforcement Agent continuing education programs
- Former Advisory Council member of the Society of Certified Recovery Agents (SCRA)
- Current Board Member of the National Association of Fraud Investigators (NAFI)
- Member of the Florida Alliance of Certified Asset Recovery Specialists (FLACARS)
- Member of the Professional Bail Agents of the United States (PBUS)
- Current Committee Member of Technology (PBUS)
- Current Committee Member of Education (PBUS)
- Board member Cybertrackers.ning.com
- As Director and co-founder for the Professional Training Group (PTG), he served as an instructor for the forty-hour State of Florida mandated course for Recovery Agents

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