

CASE STUDY

Thomson Reuters CLEAR case study: Richland County Sheriff's Department

Feedback

When a musician in Columbia, South Carolina called the Richland County Sheriff's Department to report that someone had broken into his car and stolen all of his musical equipment, Special Deputy Ramona York feared they would never be able to recover the items. The young man had no serial numbers for the equipment, and it's almost impossible to find stolen property without that information. He didn't have insurance for the items, either. Altogether, he had lost more than 30 pieces of musical instruments and gear worth around \$15,000—equipment he used for his church youth group.

Despite the long odds, Special Deputy York felt it was her mission to get these items back to the young man.

The investigation to locate the stolen property begins

York started her investigation immediately by searching for the musical equipment in pawnshops using the LeadsOnline website. LeadsOnline stores information from pawnshop businesses and drop-off ATMs throughout the US; this information is used by law enforcement agencies. Whenever reported stolen items are investigated, only items with serial numbers can be entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), however, the victim wasn't able to provide the serial numbers for his items.

York searched for certain usual brands and items, such as Fender amplifiers, Boss, Shure, and Digitech Effect Pedals, and during her search she started to notice a trend. One particular name continued to show up for pawning these certain usual items. At that point, York reversed her search and was able to locate all pawns by this individual. Reviewing the same morning of the incident, she located a list of pawned items. Every item that had been stolen from the victim's vehicle was on this pawn list—except one left-handed guitar.

Using the name of this individual, York did a reverse search in the pawn shop database and found several pages of items he had pawned in the last day, including almost all of the musical equipment the victim had reported stolen. She felt confident she had identified a person of interest related to the stolen property.

Clear provides critical information that helps solve the case

Special Deputy York ran the name through Thomson Reuters CLEAR and immediately learned the suspect lived in Washington, DC. CLEAR provided his current and former addresses, along with the addresses of relatives in Columbia, South Carolina. She noted that one relative, a brother, lived near the location where the musical equipment had been stolen.

Digging deeper, she discovered the suspect had a criminal record and traveled frequently to Columbia to visit his brother and other family members. Over time, he had pawned a wide range of items in North Carolina and South Carolina, including laptop computers, in a single week. The pawnshop was located directly between Columbia and Washington, DC.

With the help of CLEAR, Special Deputy York was able to develop a more detailed picture of the suspect.

“CLEAR helped expand her view to a national level. Without CLEAR it would have taken much longer for her to track down key details and make the connections that helped her take the next step in quickly solving the case. CLEAR made Special Deputy York's job easier. “It gave me the answer right there, right that instant,” she says.

The solution also provided the information the Richland County Sheriff's Department needed to issue a warrant. “In order for a judge to sign a warrant,” says York, “you have to have probable cause.”

In this case, probable cause amounted to finding the stolen property and determining the suspect had known associates in Columbia, along with a history of pawning items while traveling to and from the area. Identifying those connections was the most important thing CLEAR did for the Richland County Sheriff's Department.

With the help of CLEAR, the stolen property was recovered

The Richland County Sheriff's Department contacted the pawnshop in North Carolina and put a hold on the stolen property. An investigator drove to North Carolina, recovered the musical instruments and gear, and returned everything to the victim the next day. The only item that was never found was the left-handed guitar.

In addition, the department uses CLEAR every day, in a wide range of cases, including tracking down phone numbers and staying up to date on recent arrests.

“CLEAR is as easy to use as any other database,” says York, “especially when you're in a hurry in an investigation and need answers quickly.”

Ready to make a change?

For analysts and investigators who need to quickly locate, identify, and connect critical facts, Thomson Reuters CLEAR is powered by billions of data points and leverages innovative public records technology to bring all key content together in a customizable dashboard, allowing you to search data and view results in a layout that complements your workflow.

Unlike other public record platforms, all levels of government agencies trust CLEAR to provide robust, real-time data that closes gaps in investigations and gives you an edge over traditional information delays.

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