



Internet Sleuthing: NumberGuru & Spokeo

By: Christopher B. Hopkins and Tracy T. Segal

In our professional and personal lives, we are faced with questions like who is calling from an unfamiliar phone number? Who is using an unknown email address? How do we find someone? Who lives or works at a specific street address? In years past, these questions were answered by clumsy Autotrack searches or time-consuming requests for county, state or FDLE reports. Nowadays, you can accomplish these tasks instantaneously, (mostly) for free, from a PC or smartphone.

Let's begin with searching for information when you only have a phone number.

NumberGuru

A "reverse lookup" is a search where you have a phone number and want to see who owns the number. Particularly in large ESI discovery situations, you may get cell records, documents with an unknown sender's fax number or even a single document with unidentified phone numbers. The largest impediment to a reverse lookup search is that toll free, cell phone, and unlisted numbers are often dead-ends.

NumberGuru.com may be the solution for any reverse lookup search task. It is accessible on the web as well as through Android, iPhone or Windows Mobile apps. According to their marketing material, NumberGuru aggregates 100% of landline (regular) phones and nearly half of all domestic cell phones (apparently not Verizon numbers). Similarly, they have collected all toll-free and telemarketing information.

The process is free, simple, and unlimited. Simply type in the subject phone number and NumberGuru will provide the owner's name, location, phone type (e.g., mobile or landline), and carrier. NumberGuru has a "social" element to it service as well; if the number is a business or marketer, users comment and provide spam reports about the number. Most importantly, NumberGuru is fairly successful at providing information even if the number is unlisted.

If a NumberGuru search fails to find information, consider the following alternative steps: (1) simply type the unknown number into Google – this is particularly helpful if the number is a person's direct line at a law firm or business; (2) FoneFinder.net provides the city, state, and carrier information for unknown phone numbers; and (3) sites like whitepages.com, anywho.com, and 411.com are weaker alternative sites for reverse lookup searches.

Spokeo.com

Sometimes, however, you have an isolated name, email address, phone number, address or even a person's username on a specific website and you need more information. As mentioned above, when sifting through electronic discovery, you often obtain documents with unknown email addresses or fax numbers. Founded in 2006 by "two Stanford grads working out of their parents' basement," Spokeo claims that it aggregates personal information from sources as varied as social media sites to state databases. A FoxNews report in early 2011 described Spokeo.com as a "growing threat to internet privacy."

I tested the site on myself, using my name, unlisted home phone, cell phone, address, email, and a frequent website username I use. Spokeo was fairly successful as an initial search tool however more specific search sites (e.g., property appraiser, social media sites) return more accurate details.

A search for "Christopher B Hopkins" revealed several hundred *doppelgangers* nationwide and nearly 200 in Florida.

Two clicks later I was looking at 8 possible candidates in West Palm Beach. Unfortunately, two were prior addresses and one was my work address. So that was not terribly helpful since a generic Google search and a county property appraiser search would likely yield better intel.

Spokeo recognized our unlisted home phone and provided my name and address (something I've since removed under their privacy policy). Given that Spokeo charges about \$15 for three months of unlimited access, finding one person via an unlisted number might pay for itself in a single search. Conversely, it was completely wrong about my cell number. Entering my home address, Spokeo provided generic information about property ownership but it did hand over some interesting data on my neighbors. Spokeo provided little information based upon my personal email but did identify my work email. Finally, searching for a username I frequently select for websites, it was able to produce some social media information.

I Want to Search But Not Be Found

Of course, as soon as you learn how to research other people, your thoughts may turn to how to cloak your own internet and phone activity. Both NumberGuru and Spokeo have privacy policies which allow you to opt out.

Two internet tips might be helpful. Ever wonder if someone is emailing you from the office or their smartphone? A bit of IT knowledge may help. It's all in the title of your email. If someone replies to an email and it comes back as "RE: subject," the capital "RE" means the response was typed on a computer (presumably home or office). If the reply is "Re:," with a lower case email, that means it was sent on a mobile phone. On the flipside, you can cover your tracks by manually changing "e" to "E." This too might be a valuable clue if a specific email is critical to your case.

What if you want to leave a voicemail on someone's cell phone but you do not actually want to speak to someone? Download the (free) SlyDial app – this allows you to dial a mobile number and go straight to voicemail without the recipient's phone ringing.

Christopher B. Hopkins is the chair of the PBCBA Technology Committee. After you have scoured the web for his personal details you are welcome to pose any lingering questions at christopher.hopkins@akerman.com.

Of all the banks in South Florida, only one has the distinction of being called "The Lawyers' Bank."

For over 30 years, we have concentrated on providing law firms, their partners, associates, staff and clients with an uncommon level of attention and service. Which is why so many law firms in South Florida count on **Sabadell United Bank**. Whether it's business or personal banking, or private banking, our goal is to make a **measurable difference** in all relationships through exceptional service, and constant focus on delivering **measurable results** to our clients.

For more information, please call
Bud Osborne, Executive Vice President,
or Donn Londeree, Vice President at (561) 750-0075
or Vincent Cuomo, Vice President at (561) 688-9400



MEMBER
FDIC

www.sabadellunited.com

Sabadell
United Bank



©2010 Sabadell United Bank