

Being a digital investigator in 2022

Published on 22 November 2022 Written by Detective Constable Maddie deBuse

Shift in the life of... a digital investigator

Going equipped 4 mins read

My day starts with a swift walk to my local police station. I base myself in the criminal investigation department (CID) because members of the team are on a warrant this morning and the suspect is known to be an expert in encryption. I'm on hand in case the investigation team has any digital issues and it's not long before I get a call from the officers on the scene. They're in the process of arresting the suspect who has a smart phone and need to know how to seize the device without losing or deleting evidence. I answer their questions via video call so I can scan through the property with them and make sure nothing is missed. I advise on what can be left at the address and what needs to be seized.

I like being at the police station. It's important that people know who I am and that I find out what they are working on. With anything digital, a common theme is 'you don't know what you don't know', which is where I come in. By making myself available, I find opportunities to add value. I overhear officers talking about a PlayStation 5 (PS5) that has been used to commit a crime. They're discussing whether digital evidence can link the suspect to the PS5 and prove the offences, so I steer them in the right direction. The key is for officers to understand what to do and how to do it, and to be empowered and go on to educate their peers. We have an in-depth conversation about what's better, PlayStation or Xbox. I can't help it but sometimes the nerd in me escapes!

I work my way around to the neighbourhood departments. I say hello and they say they never have anything digital. I smile because there is that 'you don't know what you don't know' again. I encourage them to keep an eye on wearable technology when they see their usual suspects, and to make sure they include this in descriptions and when they submit intelligence. Information provided by neighbourhood and response officers is vital. If they know how to preserve digital evidence, the investigation teams that take over cases have a much easier time down the line.

I make my way back to CID, poking my head into the inspectors' office on my way to see what's going on. The officers have returned from their warrant, so I help them prioritise the interrogation of

their seized devices and advise how best to process the items in line with disclosure, data protection, policies and correct packaging. I also advise them on section 49 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000, which provides the power to serve a RIPA notice to a suspect, requiring them to disclose a password or code to allow access to electronic data. I contact our digital departments to request fast-tracking items to prevent any loss of evidence. This is agreed but the investigation team are interviewing and the search officers are busy, so I transport the digital items to our examination department.

I get a call from another department wanting advice on social media, in terms of what information they can get and how to go about it. I realise that this investigation needs a full strategy. It's a very serious case and I spend time reviewing the investigation, including the statements, exhibits and logs. I produce an advice document for the officer outlining how to achieve their objectives, the limitations of their digital evidence and how to proceed. I also include disclosure and file advice. This type of work is dynamic, so my advice will be the first version of many – I'll provide continuous advice and guidance as information changes.

Once that's done, it's time for me to end my shift, passing on the details of the warrant to our late-turn cover in case further support is needed from our team. A big part of my role is making other officers' jobs easier – that's what I do every day and I love it.

- This article was peer reviewed by Temporary Detective Sergeant Mark Hibbert, West Yorkshire Police

Download Going equipped

This article is from the fifth issue of Going equipped.

- [Going equipped: Issue 5 Autumn/Winter 2022 \(pdf\) 1.74 MB](#)

Take our survey on Going equipped

Your feedback helps us bring you the content you want to read. Let us know your views on Going equipped so we can improve what we do.

[Complete our short survey](#)

Tags

Going equipped Digital intelligence and investigation