

Building A Digital Timeline For Litigation

Building a digital timeline for litigation requires careful construction from independent sources, normalisation, and corroboration. This guide details the process, from raw material to defensible presentation, ensuring the chronology serves as evidence rather than mere argument.

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DIGITAL TIMELINE S · A GUIDE FOR UK LAWYERS Building a Digital Timeline for Litigation
From Scattered Timestamps to a Chronology the Court Can Trust COMPUTER FORENSICS
LAB

§ ABOUT THE AUTHOR PREPARED BY COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB E-DISCOVERY TEAM
ESTABLISHED 2007 · LONDON ISO 17025-ALIGNED PROCEDURES MULTI-SOURCE
TIMELINE CONSTRUCTION

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§ 01 · ORIENTATION Executive summary THE HEADLINE POINT:
ALITIGATIONTIMELINEISBUILT, NOTCOMPILED: EVENTSFROM
INDEPENDENTSOURCES, ONETEMPORALFRAME, CORROBORATIONPERLINE,
CONFIDENCESTATED: SOTHECHRONOLOGYISEVIDENCETHEOTHERSIDEMUST ANSWER,
NOTARGUMENTTHEYCANDISMISS

§ 02 · FIRST PRINCIPLES The problem in plain English: sequence is the case, and clocks lie politely

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§ 05 · THEWEIGHTOFEACHLINE Corroboration and confidence: making each line defensible

§ 06 · THEBUILD Construction in practice: from artefacts to the master timeline

§ 07 · INCOURT ' SHANDS Presentation and deployment: chronologies that persuade and survive

§ 08 · THEWIDERMAP Source architecture: where else the evidence lives EVENT DEVICE
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RECORDS LAYER RECOVERABLE PHYSICAL- WORLD SYSTEMS

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timeline work start?

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§ HOW A SPECIALIST LABORATORY CAN ASSIST Working with Computer Forensics Lab
Speak to a forensic examiner, not a salesperson. INSTRUCTTHELAB
NEWENQUIRIESEMAILE - DISCOVERY

Questions and answers

Why can't we just build the chronology from the documents' visible dates?

Because visible dates mix zones, semantics and drifting clocks: Example 3's spreadsheet did exactly that and fell to its own lines: and because a chronology without artefact provenance cannot answer the first challenge put to it. Compilation makes a working draft; construction (§4-§6) makes evidence.

What does "normalising to UTC" actually involve?

Establishing each source's storage convention, converting every event to one UTC base, then presenting in relevant local time with the rule stated: plus drift calibration and DST checks: §4's procedure. It is bookkeeping, not magic: the point is that after it, any two events can be legitimately compared: and before it, none can.

How precise are digital timestamps really?

As precise as their clock and resolution: synced server logs are excellent to the second; device fields are good when the clock was; free-running DVRs are only as good as their calibration; some sources resolve only to minutes or days: which is why §5 grades confidence and §10 claims orderings only at supported resolution. Precision is per-source, established, never assumed.

The other side's chronology contradicts ours. How is that resolved?

By methodology: the frames, semantics, calibrations and provenance of both are compared, conflicts diagnosed to their cause (zone error, drift, field mix-up, or a genuinely contested stamp needing guide 108-109 treatment): Examples 1 and 3 are both stories of one chronology surviving that audit and one not. Courts follow the timeline that shows its working.

Can a timeline prove who did something, or only when it happened?

The timeline orders events attributed to accounts and devices; attribution to fingers is the separate discipline of guides 105-107, and the two are built together where identity is contested: Example 2's badge, CCTV and device layers doing exactly that join. Sequence plus attribution is the full product; the timeline alone is the when.

When should timeline work start?

With the case: the best clocks (platform audit logs) sit on rolling retention that deletes them while pleadings are exchanged (§10), and the critical path defined early lets preservation and collection target its sources: guide 95's windows apply to time evidence with full force. A timeline started at trial preparation is built from what survived; one started at instruction is built from what existed. cflab. u k · e-discove r y. u k ©2026 Computer Forensics Lab Ltd ·cflab.uk ·e-discovery.uk ·info@cflab.uk ·+44 (0)20 7164 6915 Page 15 of 17

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