Preserving Social Media Evidence

Social media evidence, with its inherent impermanence, requires specific preservation strategies. This guide outlines methods for capturing posts, profiles, and stories, from self-download archives to provider records, and addresses authentication, common mistakes, and technical limitations for UK legal professionals.

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SOCIALMEDIAEVIDENCE · A GUIDE FOR UK LAWYERS Preserving Social Media Evidence Before It Changes Posts, Profiles, Stories and Deletions: Capturing a Medium Built to Move COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB

§ ABOUT THE AUTHOR PREPARED BY COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB E-DISCOVERY TEAM DELETED-CONTENT INVESTIGATION CPR PART 35 EXPERT REPORT S FULL CHAIN-OF-CUSTODY DOCUMENTATION

§ CONTENTS In this guide 01 Executive summary 02 The problem in plain English: evidence with a half-life 03 The capture ladder: methods ranked by evidential weight 04 Platform self-download archives: the account-holder route 05 The public-view route: capturing what the world could see 06 Platforms, process and what providers hold 07 Authentication: proving the post was real 08 Source architecture: where else the evidence lives 09 Worked examples 10 Common mistakes and technical limitations 11 Questions to ask · Suggested wording 12 Checklist and red flags · When to involve a digital forensic expert 13 Frequently asked questions 14 Glossary · References · Disclaimer · How a specialist laboratory can assist

§ 01 · ORIENTATION Executive summary THE HEADLINE POINT: TREATEVERYRELEVANTPOSTASSCHEDULEDFORDELETION, ANDCAPTUREATTHEHIGHESTEVIDENTIALRUNGAVAILABLETODAY

§ 02 · FIRST PRINCIPLES The problem in plain English: evidence with a half-life

§ 03 · THELADDER The capture ladder: methods ranked by evidential weight RUNG METHOD · WEIGHT · WHEN 4 · Provider records Platform-held data under legal process: account records, IP and access logs, and content 3 · Self-download archive The account's own structured export: posts, messages, media, metadata, account history: 2 · Forensic capture Documented acquisition of the live view: full pages, URLs, timestamps, request context, 1 · Screenshot A picture of a screen: no metadata, no pedigree, fabrication-trivial: better than nothing at the

§ 04 · THEACCOUNT - HOLDERROUTE Platform self-download archives: the account-holder route

§ 05 · THE PUBLIC - VIEWROUTE The public-view route: capturing what the world could see

§ 06 · THE PROVIDER S Platforms, process and what providers hold

§ 07 · ISITREAL? Authentication: proving the post was real

§ 08 · THEWIDERMAP Source architecture: where else the evidence lives EVIDENCE

PLATFORM D OWN LOAD (LEGAL LIVE SELF- PROVIDER VIEW ARCHIVE PROCESS) POSTER'S COUNTERPARTS / DELETED / DEVICES ECHOES RECOVERABLE (FFS)

§ 09 · IN THE WILD Worked examples EXAMPLE1 · THESTORYTHATEXPIREDINTOACOURSEOFCONDUCT EXAMPLE2 · THEEDITTHATTHEPAIROFCAPTURESPROVED EXAMPLE3 · THEACCOUNTDELETIONTHATUNMADEITSELF

§ 10 · WHEREITGOESWRONG Common mistakes and technical limitations Common mistakes Technical limitations

§ 11 · INTERROGATORIES & DRAFTING AIDS Questions to ask · Suggested wording Ask your client Ask your opponent Ask your e Discovery / forensic provider SUGGESTED WORDING · SOCIALMEDIALIMBFORTHEPRESER VAT I ON LETTER

§ 12 · QUICK CONTROL Checklist and red flags · When to involve a digital forensic expert The social media checklist Red flags When to involve a digital forensic expert 35. Through e-discovery.uk, captured social content is processed into review beside the estate's other

§ 13 · COMMON QUESTIONS Frequently asked questions Are screenshots of posts admissible? A post has already been deleted. What are the realistic routes? Can we make an opponent hand over their private account content? How do we deal with an anonymous account attacking our client? Our client wants to "clean up" their own profile before proceedings. Advice? Do expiring formats (stories, view-once) beat preservation?

§ 14 · REFERENCE Glossary Sources and authoritative references DISCLAIMER

§ 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

Are screenshots of posts admissible?

Admissible, yes: weighty, no: a screenshot is a document, but its fabrication-triviality means challenges succeed against it alone where they would fail against a documented capture corroborated by an archive or device artefacts. The practice rule: accept screenshots as leads, upgrade the same week, and never rest a pleaded quotation on rung 1 where rungs 2-3 were available: tribunals increasingly ask why they were not taken.

A post has already been deleted. What are the realistic routes?

In practical order: the poster's devices (creation media, app caches, drafts: Example 1's rescue); any self- d own load archive generated before deletion, or ordered now if deleted content persists in the account's export; the echo layer (reposts, quote-posts, web archives, search caches); counterpart captures and recipients; and provider windows via preservation request and process, moving fast because they close. Plus the deletion itself: dated against notice, it may be worth more than the post.

Can we make an opponent hand over their private account content?

Where relevant and proportionate, yes: private posts and messages are documents within their control: the self- d own load order is the clean mechanism (complete, structured, platform-generated), with specific disclosure of identified threads the narrower alternative. Privacy objections are weighed, not dispositive: UK GDPR and proportionality shape scope and handling (redaction, confidential it y clubs), not existence of the obligation.

How do we deal with an anonymous account attacking our client?

Sequence per §6: capture everything now (rung 2, scheduled recaptures); provider preservation request immediately; then the disclosure route against the platform for account and access data (the Norwich Pharmacal line), with service and jurisdiction navigated for non-UK entities; and in parallel, the contextual investigation: who knew what the account knew, posting-time patterns, linguistic and device overlaps: which has unmasked accounts that IP logs alone could not. Expectations honest: determined anonymity some time s holds; the capture record ensures the content is usable against whoever is eventually fixed with it.

Our client wants to "clean up" their own profile before proceedings. Advice?

In terms: once litigation is contemplated, deleting or editing relevant content is spoliation with a timestamp: the other side captures too, and Examples 2-3 show how loudly changes date themselves. The lawful path: freeze the accounts, archive them, and address bad content by evidence and submission: context, apology where wise, honest explanation: rather than deletion that converts an embarrassing post into a conduct finding. This advice, given in writing at matter-open, has saved more positions than any capture tool.

Do expiring formats (stories, view-once) beat preservation?

They compress it: the display window binds the public-view capture, so the race is real (same-day, some time s same-hour): but the format's promise is thinner than it looks: creation media persists poster-side, archives log the posting, viewers capture, and platforms hold short windows: Example 1's fourteen videos. The advice pairing: race the window when

warned in time; when not, work the creation side and the viewers: expiry defeats the casual observer, not the map. cflab. u k · e-disc ove 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