

## CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

# The Houston County Sheriff's Office: Finding More Evidence, Faster, with Magnet AXIOM

## THE ISSUES

- Increasing volumes of digital data from multiple devices
- Hard to find data owing to a lack of results from certain digital forensics solutions
- Limited examiner resources — 3 examiners to handle hundreds of cases a year
- Stretched budgets — though relatively well-accommodated, there is a concerted effort to keep budgets affordable for taxpayers

## MAGNET FORENSICS TOOLS

- Magnet AXIOM's enhanced processing speeds and multiple device queuing move cases to analysis faster, getting evidence to investigators sooner
- Collaboration tools make it easier to share cases for review and completion
- Industry-standard pricing for one tool that extracts images, processes data, and examines both smartphones and computers, as well as other removable media

**Name:** Lt. Darin Meadows

**State:** Georgia, U.S.

**Investigation Type:**  
Computer & Mobile

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## BACKGROUND

The Houston County Sheriff's Office serves more than 130,000 residents in Warner Robins, Georgia. The digital forensics group in its lab has to be ready to investigate any crime, including homicides, burglary, and crimes against juveniles. In addition, the HCSO is a member of the Georgia Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force — stepping in to help reduce state-wide case back log.

The flow of cases to the forensic lab is constant, and as smartphones and other connected devices continue to proliferate at an unbelievable pace, the number of devices that may be involved with a crime and come through the lab is increasing.

Like most departments, there is limited budget available to build the toolbox needed to address this influx of digital evidence. Time is, in the most meaningful way, of the essence and the results need to be robust, accurate and detailed. No one can afford missed pieces of evidence.

Lieutenant Darin Meadows has been in law enforcement for over 28 years, with a focus on forensics for the last 17. Beginning his digital forensics career when DOS was the only game in town, he's had a front and center view as investigations increasingly found their way into the digital world.

Supervising a team of juvenile-crimes investigators while simultaneously running the digital forensic lab at the Houston County Sheriff's Office, Lt. Meadows relies on a few fellow forensic examiners along with his digital forensics software toolbox to help him not only work through a constant flow of cases.

## THE AGE OF DIGITAL INFORMATION OVERLOAD

As Lt. Meadows has watched the digital era dawn, he has seen the impact of smartphones, tablets, laptops and other digital tech on forensics. From cases with one or two computers to today's standard of everyone owning a cell phone, or having access to one, not to mention tablets, laptops, gaming systems, USB sticks, and more, the amount of seized, potentially relevant evidence is piling up.

Lt. Meadows needed to find a way to help his team and his lab continue to be productive within case time constraints. The answer to this lies in partnership between the investigators, examiners and technology. Over time Lt. Meadows has tested and used most forensics products available. But when it came time to purchase, he had to carefully curate the ones he selected. He explains: "I have a set amount of money that I generally get to my budget, and I know what products I have and I need. I've thrown out some that I feel are duplicative."

Like all labs, the Houston County Sheriff's Office must have multiple tools – not just for niche uses or because of various technological limitations, but for verification and credibility of evidence.

Lt. Meadows has had to choose the tools that would find all the needed evidence and not require constant investments in terms of costs for new features or new versions.



## WHY MAGNET AXIOM?

Lt. Meadows was able to sample Magnet Forensics products during their earliest stages, and has found it to be one of his most reliable tools. “It pulls data that sometimes I don’t get using other products, so it’s been very beneficial. I will generally use it as a primary, or sometimes a secondary tool.”

Of course, Magnet AXIOM is a great tool to start an investigation with, but it’s also useful for investigators when revisiting the information they’ve extracted from another solution. Lt. Meadows elaborates: “On mobile devices, I’ll go to other tools to see if I can get a physical acquisition. I have found that even on physical acquisitions and sometimes file system acquisitions, other tools don’t always parse out the data the way it should. I’ve had issues with that. I can look at the phone and see there’s text messages on it, but after I process it, there’s no text messages, and then I’ll go over and try AXIOM and will get the results I’m searching for. (see “Using Magnet AXIOM to Find More” for a real situation where this was the case.)

Lt. Meadows has found a great experience not only with Magnet Forensics products, but also with its customer support. “The customer support is great. I can tell you, I’ve had some forensic products over the years that were not supported very well. Some products on the market very early on supported law enforcement, and were very law enforcement friendly, but today they are not.”

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## USING MAGNET AXIOM TO FIND MORE

When citing examples of AXIOM in use, Lt. Meadows offers a specific example of a case in which AXIOM was crucial to getting the evidence he needed to obtain a conviction:

“In a case that went to trial this year, an individual was arrested for drugging his stepdaughter with Ambien and molesting her.

We got involved a day or two after the incident and we got his phone — a Samsung Galaxy. We found a video of the incident that had been deleted on his microSD card, which is standard forensics, not a big deal.

We processed the phone with another tool, did a search for “Ambien” and got no hits whatsoever. I then pulled that physical acquisition into AXIOM and processed it. AXIOM actually managed to go out and rebuild deleted internet history from the image of the phone — containing information showing that he was searching for legal defenses for Ambien, how long does Ambien stay in your system, etc. Then it showed that he went in and deleted that history.

That was presented in trial and he was convicted by a jury. That was a case where if I had just relied on one product it may have had a different outcome. They may not have found that evidence to present in trial for a jury.”



## SEE MAGNET AXIOM IN ACTION FOR YOURSELF

With a number of solutions in his arsenal, Lt. Meadows has his pick when it comes to digital forensics software — and more and more Magnet AXIOM is among the first ones he uses. With its vast acquisition capabilities, its powerful examination engine, and its easy-to-view reporting, Magnet AXIOM is a valuable part of any examiner's collection.

If you'd like to learn more about Magnet AXIOM and how it can help find evidence you may be missing with other solutions, visit [magnetaxiom.com](http://magnetaxiom.com). While you're there, you can learn more about the product, request an in-depth personal demo from an AXIOM expert, and request a free 30-day trial version.

Learn more at [magnetforensics.com](http://magnetforensics.com)

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