

CASE STUDY - KERR COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

MAGNET ATLAS™

How a Texas Sheriff's Office Speeds Up Digital Investigation by Days



We keep on top of things and get a very quick turnaround on our devices. ATLAS is instrumental in keeping that flow.”

— Lucas Flores, Digital Forensics Investigator, Kerr County Sheriff's Office

The Challenge

Once word got out, the requests poured in.

Lucas Flores manages every day what he used to process during an entire month.

As the only full-time digital forensics investigator for the Kerr County Sheriff's Office in central Texas, Flores saw digital evidence requests increase from one or two devices per month to as many as 30 devices in the same period.

The exponential growth over a few years stems from technology advancement and increased capabilities.

“Every crime that is committed now has a digital footprint of some kind,” explains Flores.

His full-service lab responds to intrusion events and ransomware calls, though other criminal offenses—including narcotics cases totalling half of the workload—also generate digital evidence through text messages, mapped routes, doorbell camera footage and more. One child exploitation case alone can result in a dozen devices for processing.



The Kerr County Sheriff's Office enforces all laws and ordinances, protects life and property, preserves the peace, and strives to prevent crime and disorder.

Located in Kerrville, Texas

Serves more than 60,000 citizens

INVESTIGATIONS

- Digital forensics, eDiscovery, & data recovery
- Data security and privacy compliance
- Penetration testing and managed security services

RESULTS

- Shaves hours off intake and processing
- Eliminates calls to check status
- Drives case workflow among dispersed team



As a one-man show, Flores got busier and busier. Then, he obtained certification at the National Computer Forensics Institute (NCFI) and word got out. “Training and equipment only made my workload that much more because I had more capabilities,” he says.

Paperwork and spreadsheets couldn't keep up.

When he started out, Flores coordinated digital evidence via paper forms piled in a binder.

With the county seat in Kerrville—the next largest city for 500 miles between San Antonio and El Paso—officers could drive hours to drop off a phone and fill out a request. Flores tracked efforts manually, flipping through pages any time a requestor called to check status.

“ I quickly realized paper tracking for digital evidence investigation was unsustainable. I needed something more user friendly.”

To this end, Flores started keeping tabs on the devices in spreadsheets with hyperlinks to scanned images of request and search authority forms.

“Spreadsheets looked nicer, but they were just as big of a hassle, if not more so. It swallowed a lot of time keeping up with that.”

How Magnet ATLAS Helps

A hub for working the case faster

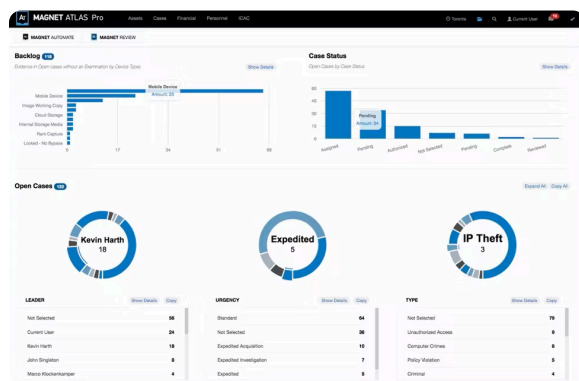
Though Flores gained part-time help, he recognized the need to meet digital challenges with a modern digital solution.

“The amount of evidence out there is tremendous. For us to handle it effectively starts with managing the lab.”

Tossing the paper and spreadsheets, Flores turned to Magnet ATLAS™ to drive digital investigations. Kerr Sheriff’s Office also uses Magnet AXIOM™ along with other discovery and analysis tools.

Flores describes the impact of ATLAS collaborative lab management software as “an absolute game-changer,” shaving days off of device turnaround and workflow compared to previous methods. His lab gained a reputation as the place to go to get things done.

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Centralization drives faster turnaround

Using ATLAS, officers and investigators can submit requests and search authority documentation themselves—even remotely, saving time for them and Flores. “The ability to have others be responsible for some of the input shaves hours off every day for me,” he noted. When Flores completes the intake, he simply uploads a photo of the device and prints labels.

“ATLAS has been a huge help in organizing the lab and returning efficiency,” Flores relates. “Every device intake only takes five minutes versus an hour, which means I can get to the examination sooner.”

Then, all case data is managed, trackable and available through ATLAS. When a device is ready, Flores saves time by allowing stakeholders to log in and access findings directly.



ATLAS does everything that I need it to do. Now, I have a chain of custody, photographs, the narrative...it's all in one location and it's fantastic.”

Furthermore, ATLAS is customizable to Kerr County Sheriff’s Office reporting needs. “It’s not a take it or leave it software,” Flores says. “The customizability allows me to collect and report the data that is specific to my jurisdiction.”

Collaboration Enhances Productivity

Whether in the same building or 200 miles away, any team member with approved role-based access can contribute to an active investigation. They can also obtain real-time and historical reports on a self-serve basis rather than pulling Flores from other mission-critical tasks.

“I don’t get any more calls saying ‘I dropped off the phone 45 minutes ago. Is it done yet?’ ” Flores says. “Instead, I tell them: We’ve got it. You will get emails as we progress and you’ll be notified at the end of the examination when we click finalize.”

If a team member still contacts Flores to locate a device, he simply searches the CSE number, sometimes even finding the requestor signed for it the week before.

Scaffolding to close the case

Saving time is a welcome outcome. Ensuring skilled hours of its lead investigator stay focused on examinations rather than busywork furthers Kerr County Sheriff Office’s mission for enforcing the law.

Faster turnaround and effective efforts made possible through ATLAS lab management support an entire team building a strong case.

“Digital forensics is relentless, detailed work,” Flores notes. “It’s a relief to find an efficient system for managing critical digital evidence in support of justice.”

Flores reported a successful return on investment for his department’s implementation of ATLAS. In fact, he champions the solution to other organizations when given the chance.



I shudder at the thought of ever having to go back to spreadsheets,” he concludes. “To help them, I tell everybody that they need Magnet ATLAS.”

To learn more about Magnet ATLAS and see it in action visit magnetforensics.com/magnet-atlas.

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