

MAKING A CASE

John Colbert knows how to get inside your PDA

John Colbert is one of the lucky few. He has not only identified his passion – doing his part to better society – but has also continually found ways to work toward achieving his aims. That was Colbert's inspiration when he joined the U.S. Army and became a helicopter chief, and the same ideals later prompted him to pursue a career in law enforcement that included a 15-year stint with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

That background would make Colbert's jump to the private sector and Pasadena, Calif.-based Guidance Software seem a major leap. But the move into the entrepreneurial environment was a natural one. "As an accomplished investigator, being able to play a key role in developing Guidance's EnCase solution allowed me to have a significant impact on the establishment of international standards for computer forensics," he says. "Up to this point there was no technology specifically developed for computer forensics."

The introduction of EnCase has changed the entire landscape of computer forensics – the preservation, identification, and documentation of computer evidence, particularly evidence of criminal activity. In fact, by tapping into Colbert's intimate knowledge of the criminal mind, Guidance has shifted the field of computer forensics from a "technology of the future" to a real-world investigative tool. EnCase facilitates the capture, examination, and analysis of data stored on computer media in such a way that the findings are admissible as evidence in a court of law.

EnCase has provided a basis for investigations of recent high-profile criminal cases, including the BTK murders and the Scott Peterson case. It has also been used in a wide array of corporate cases, such as investigations ongoing at Enron and WorldCom. In addition, Colbert notes that EnCase has proven useful in helping international intelligence operations track and defuse al-Qaida terrorist activities.

"It finds useful data and bundles it in a manner that it becomes usable evidence in the courtroom environment," he says. "[When] it is necessary to examine a computer, PDA, or cell phone, EnCase plays a crucial role in successfully developing a case, regardless of past language barriers."

The biggest challenge has revolved around protecting the information's usability in court. "You need to have a chain of custody," he says, "and you also need to make sure that the electronic data you are presenting is an accurate copy of the original," something EnCase accomplishes through "digital fingerprints." Because of the firm's diligent efforts in developing a standards-driven program, the technology is accepted in courts in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

In his role as CEO of Guidance, Colbert has made use of skills he honed in law enforcement, such as active listening and continuously looking for the root of problems.

"When you combine those two, it is amazing how quickly you can come

up with workable solutions," he says. "For instance, at Guidance, this skill set has been instrumental in helping the team develop new software features that the market desired, and will ultimately serve as a premise as we move forward. My influence helped to ensure that the design would fit within the purview of the investigative process."

As Colbert has progressed from one phase of his career to the next, he has realized that there comes a point when reflection starts to take hold. "People either think back with regret or satisfaction, and I want my recollections to be those of satisfaction," he says. "This is something that more business leaders need to consider this as they work to develop their organizations. You need to look within and ask yourself why you are doing what you are doing, and whether it makes an impact on the world. That is when you know you are working from the heart. If you are simply building something with the sole intention of selling it down the road, you are really missing the boat."

– Peter Fretty



Guidance counselor: John Colbert ensures that important data sees the light of day.