

Public Record Update

January - 2015

Update on Three States' Court Record Access Systems

Maine - New Name Search Procedures in Place Statewide

The Maine Judicial Branch has fully implemented a new procedure for all civil and criminal name search requests. The Judicial Branch Service Center, in Lewiston, Maine is the central location for all record search requests for all District and Superior Courts in the State of Maine and the Violations Bureau. **All walk-in and mail name search requests made at the local individual courts are no longer honored.** One must have the case number in order to obtain documents in person.

The new system requires that all requests must be submitted on the agency's Request for Records Search Form. The fee is \$20.00 per name per location; however, the fee includes a search of both the criminal and civil docket index if requested. The agency hopes to provide a turnaround time of 1 to 2 days; record searchers report the turnaround time is as much as 2 weeks.

A web page to a detailed explanation of this new system, including a direct link to the Request Form, is at: www.courts.maine.gov/fees_forms/forms/pdf_forms/misc/records.shtml

Mississippi - Online Access Expanding

Mississippi is implementing the Mississippi Electronic Courts System (MEC). The MEC System is a comprehensive case management system which allows courts to offer electronic case filing and to maintain electronic case files using the Web. The system closely resembles the Federal Courts' CM/ECF case management system. At least 21 Circuit, County and Chancery Courts are now participating with more courts planning to participate in the near future. Attorneys registered with MEC may file and view documents from any court participating on the system.

How MEC Works:

MEC provides access to case documents filed electronically. There is a \$10.00 annual registration fee and a charge of \$.20 per page to view documents. Criminal, civil, probate, and eviction cases are among those cases available. Divorce, adoption, mental commitment and debt collection cases are not available. Records may be searched by case number, file date, nature of the case or suit, attorney name, and by party name. However there are no identifiers used as part of a name search and limited identifiers are shown on results. Also at this time there is no indication on the web page of the through put of records for the participating courts. Some courts are adding their historical electronic case files and some courts do not have historical electronic cases to place on the system.

A final note of caution, at this time the MEC is not an online/onsite equivalent system and should only be used as a secondary source. For details on MEC visit <http://courts.ms.gov/mec/mec.html>.

Arkansas - Two Systems in Place

A growing number of Arkansas Courts are participating on a look-up by name or case number called CourtConnect at <https://caseinfo.aoc.arkansas.gov>.

What is important to note is there are **two levels** of record searching; **one is thorough, one is very limited.**

The **thorough level** has over 30 Circuit Courts, plus District Courts from 5 counties, and 2 Counties with Probate only participating. The data provided is fairly detailed information that goes back in time a good number of years. The system provides links to case images for some records. Cases available include

civil, criminal, domestic relations, and probate. If you do not provide a DOB, there is no DOB provided.

The **limited level** has 22 Circuit Courts participating, but these courts provide very limited data online - all cases are not included. What is shown for these courts is only the data as provided on paper cover sheets to the Administrative Office of the Courts and the participating Circuit Court may not report all case types on paper. The searches are not onsite equivalent. If you do not provide a DOB, there is no DOB provided.

Throughout 2015, at least 10 more counties will be added to this system. The web page provides a list of the courts participating on each of these levels.

How to Search for Hidden Assets

The text below is taken from pages 194-195 of Cynthia Hetherington's new book - [*The Guide to Online Due Diligence Investigations*](#)

Using the Five W's

Locating hidden assets is important for fraud investigations, locating special interest monies (i.e. funding for organized crime and terrorism). Hiding assets from ex-spouses, business partners, debtors or others who are there to collect on open liens and judgments is common practice. The investigator's challenge in finding assets will take them through the five W's.

1. **With Whom:** Individuals will hide their money under aliases, or with relatives, friends, and partners.
2. **Where:** For cash accounts, which are nearly impossible to locate, funds could be stashed away in their home, or in a safe deposit box. Money can be kept in offshore and foreign accounts.
3. **When Paid Ahead:** Money could be reserved in overpayments to life insurance policy, credit cards, federal tax payments, or mortgage payments.
4. **As What Cash:** could be turned into expensive physical assets as such automobiles, boats, planes, jewelry, and art. The asset can then be relocated to a brother, spouse, friend or other party to hold onto while being investigated.
5. **Why Not For a Rainy Day:** Keeping cash liquid for easy access could result in money being found as traveler's checks, savings bonds, money markets, or checking accounts filed under a different Social Security number (a subsidiary corporate FEIN which is now defunct, or perhaps a child's SS #).

Use your creative thinking skills when looking for these assets; the following tips will help.

Search Tactics

Some tactics for tracking hidden properties when the address is unknown:

- Search under the spouse name.
- Search under the father, mother, or sibling name.
- Search under the business name.
- Search by trust name. (Usually the last name of the family)

Some tactics for tracking hidden properties when the address is known:

- Run the address and find the last owner. Contact that entity and request to see the sale documents. The attorney of note and purchaser should be two key pieces within that mountain of paperwork.
- Search the address in business databases. It can be an office location, and not a real home address.

For example, when I researched a senior executive, I found that all his mail went to his office. Searching deeper, I noticed that his residential address was the same as his office. Finally, it dawned on me that he owned the building, a high-rise structure with most floors dedicated to business and the penthouse floor

devoted to him personally.

Another key point on searching properties is the interaction you will have with individuals while researching them. Several of the fee-based resources will flag suspicious addresses when they match business post offices (UPS Store/MailBoxes Etc.), prison addresses, campuses, or similar, shared locations.

Little used, but very effective, D&B allows you to run an address search. If the subject is running a fraudulent operation from any of those shared addresses, or actually has more than one business running out of his suite or office address, it will list all the businesses registered there. Other recommended sources for similar searches are the public-record databases mentioned earlier.

Note: Ms. Hetherington's book (336 pages, \$22.50) is available from Amazon, or [PI Magazine](#), or [BRB Publications](#), or bookstores nationwide.

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