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Conducting a canvass is not always about knocking on doors and requesting information.

There are other types of canvasses that exist and are sometimes overlooked. These canvasses, when conducted properly, can be extremely important to your case. I developed the acronym **SHAVE**, to help investigators remember them:

Surveillance Camera Canvass

Hospital Canvass

Additional witnesses

Vehicle Canvass

Evidence Canvass

Surveillance Camera Canvass

The use of surveillance cameras by both commercial and privately owned properties offers an investigator an invaluable source of information. The next best thing to being

there when the incident happened is to get it on tape. The investigator should be aware of the following potential problems: proprietary software – the tape may not work on your equipment, a lack of knowledge by the end user (i.e. store clerk), the tape/video is recorded at another site, and the famous, no video/DVD in the machine.

Case Study: All video has “value.” No matter how dark, fuzzy or blurry the video is, the perpetrator can still be identified. It may be by a piece of clothing, hat, jacket or piece of jewelry or in one case I had, one of the perpetrators in a vicious murder was identified by a security officer by his discernable limp!

Hospital Canvass

It is quite possible that your suspect, or witness who does not want to be identified, has sought some sort of medical attention after an incident: a brawl, shooting, stabbing, gang fight, hit and run, etc. Often these individual(s) will drive to a hospital in another jurisdiction to throw off any suspicion. Therefore it is a go idea to expand your search beyond the immediate area.

Case Study: After a multiple shooting at a night club, one of the perpetrators was shot in the foot and driven to the hospital by one of his friends. The friend drove up to the emergency room, dropped him off and then fled the scene. A careful examination of the surveillance tape revealed the license plate of the vehicle which led to an additional arrest.

Additional Witnesses Canvass

Locating additional witnesses are the main reason to conduct a canvass. An investigator should start at the scene of the incident and spiral outwards. This affords them a chance at inclusiveness. The skilled investigator interacts with and builds rapport to extract information from people who may otherwise be unwilling to provide it. The investigator must go beyond the private houses, commercial strips and apartment buildings. They must seek out letter carriers, construction workers, dog walkers, confidential informants, parolees, the homeless and common criminals that “work” in the area. In addition, a follow up canvass is extremely important and should be conducted 24 hours, seven (7) and twenty-one (21) days after the incident.

Vehicle Canvass

The vehicle canvass is a simple task that requires noting the license plates of vehicles in and around the area of a crime scene. A thorough review of a properly conducted vehicle canvass can prove or disprove a suspect’s alibi or it can be used to find out where your target is laying his/her head. In addition, law enforcement officials have a tool called a License Plate Reader (LPR). The LPR records all of the license plates in the target area and provides a printout of the registered owners. This information is discoverable for defense purposes and can provide additional witnesses or suspects.

Case Study: Are you working on a case that did not have a vehicle canvass conducted? Then try this. Some municipalities allow

you to pay your parking ticket online by punching in your plate number. If you know your target’s vehicle information, enter it into one of these sites. This search can provide an investigator with the time, date, infraction and most importantly, the location.

Evidence Canvass

An investigator should never take for granted that all evidence has been identified and properly collected by the police in a criminal investigation. If possible, respond to the original location and conduct a search of the area. Have a plan for how and what you are going to search. If you find something that maybe evidence in a criminal investigation, photograph it in place (*in situ*) and notify the proper authorities so it can be “bagged and tagged.”

Canvasses, if done properly, can yield the information required to successfully close a case or resurrect an old one. Each type of canvass should receive a separate investigator’s report and be indexed for easy reference. Remember, the best investigative efforts will be lost if the information is not properly documented and recorded.