



CASE STUDY

Review of WebPreserver online evidence collection solution

A product review by Tony Imossi, Head of the Secretariat for the Association of British Investigators (ABI)



WebPreserver
a Pagefreezer Solution

ABI
Association of British Investigators
Upholding Professional Values



INTRODUCTION

With billions of people active on social media every day, these platforms offer incredible opportunities for online investigators. As people share every meal, workout, and vacation online, finding proof of lies and fraudulent claims has become easier than ever before. In fact, social media investigation has become a field in and of itself, with many legal and investigative professionals turning to social media before doing anything else.

With this in mind, Pagefreezer created our WebPreserver forensic preservation tool. WebPreserver is a Chrome plugin that enables legal teams and investigators to collect and preserve third-party content from social media (or any other website) directly through the browser.

WebPreserver behaves like an actual person using Facebook or some other social media platform. When you're on a Facebook page of interest, you simply click the WebPreserver Chrome extension, and then choose from Facebook-specific options such as capturing videos and expanding posts and comments. You can set a date range for what to capture and you can add tags and notes in a metadata layer for your own reference.

WebPreserver exports captures in several common formats suitable for eDiscovery software or to be used as is, including image PDF, searchable PDF (OCR), WARC, MHTML, or JPEG—as well as separate MP4 files if any videos exist in the capture. Previews enable you to see what each export format will look like.

WebPreserver also generates a Collection Report for authentication proof. It lists the captured URL, time and date, IP address, web browser, name and email address of the person who conducted the capture, and most importantly, encrypted digital signatures that prove authenticity.

AN EXPERT OPINION

Of course, while features and capabilities can seem impressive on paper, all that truly matters is whether a tool meets the needs of professionals. So we asked a seasoned investigator to take a look at WebPreserver and give us his opinion of the product.



Tony Imossi, Association of British Investigators

We approached Tony Imossi, an investigator with decades of experience, to use WebPreserver as part of his day-to-day investigations. In 1981, Tony established an agency to provide discreet, confidential investigation services for the legal profession. He specialises in corporate fraud, theft, due diligence, and general litigation support. Previously, during a career spanning 15 years in the legal profession, he worked in a number of areas of litigation for London solicitors.

Tony also joined the Association of British Investigators (ABI) in 1986. He was the key designer of the compliance documentation and good practice policies for the membership of the

ABI and continues to hold regular intense training workshops on data protection for the ABI. He is also the head of the organisation's secretariat.

Pagefreezer asked him to use WebPreserver while performing his usual investigative work. "Fortunately, I was busy with a couple of large investigations that gave me an opportunity to test the product. The one case involved a suspected fraudulent loan and the other the theft of a valuable item. In both instances I thought that there might be some post or comment on social media that could be useful, so I captured several accounts on Facebook and Twitter with WebPreserver," says Tony.

Thanks to WebPreserver, he did not need to spend hours collecting posts and comments manually. Instead, he could simply capture entire accounts, and then use keyword search to identify relevant content later.

"The full-text searchable PDFs are very useful," says Tony. "Being able to capture everything and then quickly search through it after the fact allows you to expand your social media investigations without being overwhelmed by the amount of potential evidence you're dealing with. I liked how the tool scrolled through timelines and expanded comments automatically. Under normal circumstances, that would be very time-consuming and labour-intensive."

Indeed, the way in which WebPreserver can speed up an investigation is a key benefit for Tony. “Employing someone to spend hours manually collecting social media evidence through screenshots is very expensive. Moreover, it’s slow and monotonous work, which means people can become bored and make costly mistakes. I always compare it to a stakeout. You can spend days sitting in your car in front of a building with nothing happening, but the moment you lose focus and turn your attention to something else, that’s when something happens!”

Another important consideration is the fact that valuable social media evidence can be deleted at any moment. “I’m often amazed by what people will post on social media, but as soon as they realise that they’ve shared something that could potentially incriminate them, they’re going to take it down. Because of this, it’s crucial that investigators act quickly. WebPreserver allows you to do this. You can capture an entire timeline or account before some crucial piece of evidence disappears.”



WEBPRESERVER USE CASES

Although WebPreserver also allows investigators to capture complete websites, Tony sees the ability to collect social media evidence as the primary benefit. “It was really the ability to capture complete social media accounts and export those in searchable format that caught my attention,” says Tony.

When it comes to the kinds of investigations that he believes WebPreserver could be useful in, he sees a wide variety of possible applications. “Apart from the two fraud and theft investigations that I mentioned earlier, I can also see the tool being very useful when it comes to investigations related to intellectual property theft and copyright infringement,” says Tony. “I think it’s a versatile tool. Investigators are only really limited by their imaginations. There’s a lot of evidence that a tool like this will allow you to collect.”

That said, Tony also believes that this kind of easy open-source information gathering comes with significant responsibility. “This ability to process personal information invisibly demands that investigators act responsibly and only employ a tool like WebPreserver if there’s a legitimate reason to do so. Because there is no official regulation in the UK, the ABI acts as the voice and standard bearer for British investigators. We’ve imposed our own voluntary code of ethics and standards to ensure that members employ investigative tools in the right way and for the right reasons.”

Speaking of ABI members, Tony also believes that a tool like WebPreserver might be too expensive for smaller members. “Given the price, I don’t think a sole investigator would be able to justify the price, unless they are involved in a significant long-term investigation that would greatly benefit from it. For the most part, I see this as something that would be best suited to large investigative firms and in-house corporate investigative departments.”

Overall, Tony was impressed by what WebPreserver had to offer. “I have one case that I’ve been working on for more than three years. I wish I had WebPreserver when I started on the case; it would have saved me so much time,” he concludes.

About the ABI

Formed in 1913, the Association of British Investigators is the home of professional private sector investigation in the United Kingdom. In an industry that remains unregulated, the organisation exists to raise standards and to see the credibility of members recognised.

The organisation has around 450 members today, and any investigator who applies for ABI membership is rigorously vetted. He or she has to produce a criminal records certificate that meets the ABI Policy Statement, hold adequate professional indemnity insurance, and show sound financial probity. References are also thoroughly checked, and membership is only offered following a face-to-face interview. Only the best investigators are accepted as ABI members.

For more information, visit: www.theabi.org.uk

