

## Bumps in the Night!!!!

August 2013 Issue

### Tools of the Trade

#### Beginners Guide to Video Data Review

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This is a quick introduction to the process of video data review. Each investigation team may have different rules and process that may differ slightly from the process we use here at TnT Paranormal, but for the most part should be very similar. Many tips are personal preference and should be adjusted to what is comfortable to you. We will discuss video file formats in an upcoming article.

**Hardware:** Digital video review is done on a computer, so naturally you need one. This can be desktop or laptop, and should have enough free disk space to temporarily store the video file(s) that you will be reviewing as well as sufficient memory. The size of the video file is determined by the recording length, resolution, framerate, and compression/encoding used. The computer monitor should be reasonable size/resolution and positioned for viewing comfort and minimal glare.

**Software:** Become familiar with the video software that you will be using. At TnT Paranormal, we use a popular shareware (free) cross-platform multimedia player called VLC Media Player (<http://www.videolan.org/vlc/>) that is available for Windows, Mac, and LINUX and supports all the common video formats. For consistency, the team should all use the same version of the same application. For this article we will use VLC Media Player in all examples.

**Setting:** Pick a comfortable location and time of day with minimal distractions. For me, it's later in the evening when everyone has gone to bed and it's quiet in the house.

**Prepare:** Review the case information (diagrams, floor plans, photos, etc) as to where the video camera was located (if stationary) and what rooms are located off camera. Check the investigation logs and note when quiet time starts/stops and when the rotations are and who are in them.

OK, now that we have the basics out of the way let's get started.

Open the video file but before you hit play there are a few things to check and set.

- Review the Key bindings (Preferences/Hotkeys) for the application to see what key presses do what. My keys are set to the Spacebar pauses the video, so when I see something interesting, I can smack the spacebar and freeze things to make a mental note of the timestamp and then backup (using the L/R arrow keys for 3 sec jumps) to review as needed.
- Size the video window to a comfortable size that is large enough to see the details but not so large that your eyes can't pick up movement anywhere in video space. I typically size mine at double size.
- If audio is embedded as part of the video review the audio component as well but make sure both mediums get equal focus.
- Make sure the review is done at 1x speed but know how to use the speed controls (mine are up/down arrows) to slow down the video as needed for certain events.

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We are now ready to start reviewing. Hit **play** and let the fun begin!! Below are a few tips as you perform the review.

- As you review, hit **space** to pause and **space** again to un-pause, or the **play** icon to start/stop the video.
- Take notes of milestone activities such as investigation teams in the room along with enter and exit times as well as any unusual activity.
- When reviewing for long periods, to avoid eye fatigue and focus loss, fixate on a general region of the screen somewhat centrally located and periodically move that fixation point. Your peripheral vision will detect movement.
- Use team procedures to report any video events that 'may' be paranormal. At an absolute minimum you will need: Who, What, Where, and When. The times reported is the offset time into the file (at bottom of window, 00:24 in above example) as opposed to the DVR/camcorder time recorded in the video frame, but this may differ based on team procedures.
- If you find yourself losing focus, take a break. Many find it useful to play soft music in the background, assuming that audio is not included in the video.
- Once the video is done, I like to do several high speed reviews of the video by clicking on the position diamond at bottom of window and swiping it back and forth at a steady and even pace to detect items moved or very slow events that would not normally be noticed when watching at 1x speed (i.e. Cup slides 6" over the course of 30 minutes).