

How to Build Compelling Stories by Investigating Email

By Bob Krantz, Chief Executive Officer

Email is one of the most vital and valuable assets of an organization. It provides a written history into the who, what, where, and how for each event that's occurred over time. Never in history has this been more clearly understood than over the past several months. One high-profile email scandal after another has ruled the 24-hour news cycle and gripped our attention.

As Thomas Frank of The Guardian pointed out in his opinion piece [“Forget the FBI cache; the Podesta emails show how America is run.”](#)

...in truth their [The Podesta Emails] significance goes far beyond mere scandal: they are a window into the soul of the Democratic party and into the dreams and thoughts of the class to whom the party answers.

Access to a single, high-ranking mailbox provided investigators with thousands of storylines ranging from internal gossip, daily minutia, and junk to things like communication strategy, private donor information, and high-level connections.

This post is not about politics, whether hacking right or wrong, or sharing juicy stories from the news. The point is that email serves as our primary means to communicate and thus becomes a written memory. Effective search and analysis of email paired with an end goal can provide better knowledge sharing, more efficient investigations, and improved legal strategy.

Email Has Lots of Distractions, Finding the Story Can Be Difficult

A single mailbox contains many stories,

generally making it hard to discover the ones of interest. The key to constructing an effective storyline through an email investigation is having an objective and a fundamental understanding of what you are looking for before getting started. Hal Marcus (OpenText Discovery), highlights this in a recent [article](#) where the right approach can make a big difference in your success. As the article notes, “start with the knowns, move on to the unknowns – then maybe you will find the unknown unknowns.”

A great place to start is developing a series of assumptions and experiments. For instance, paid speeches via the Clinton Foundation was one of the storylines related to the John Podesta emails. To uncover support for this storyline, you may start by exploring Conceptual Topics or Clusters related to speeches combined with any communication that includes the Clinton Foundation email domain. This may surface email attachments that include file names related to annual reports, financials, or highlight additional people or companies of interest. Depending on the information identified, more questions may become known, providing you with new paths to explore.

Exploring the Results to Build the Narrative

Recent advancements in technology combined with traditional filtering methods, provide a layered approach to help uncover storylines. For example, using our first experiment, we identified a handful of annual reports for the foundation, from these documents we could see related email conversations to determine who was communicating, the language used, the key people or companies that were paying for speeches,

and how much they spent from year to year.

Using exploratory search, we can also look for certain keywords and phrases to search, or we can use the actual document to return anything conceptually related. Provided the technology stores these additional data points, we can combine the companies, people, and topics of interest with the additional concepts and searches we have run to further develop our story.

Combining Data Points to Find the Story

Through experimenting, exploring results, and expanding the scope with the key facts identified, we have created a pool of information that connects the key parts of a story. Investigative technology not only helps you explore and experiment with data but also provides multi-dimensional tools to combine each layer at the same time to show the story. Combining the findings into a multi-dimensional view presents a summary of:

- the people discussing paid speeches
- what companies or people worked with the Clinton Foundation for speeches
- when the speeches occurred
- available communication related to companies or speeches
- what that communication pertained to

Through these connections, the data will uncover the stories to be told, whether you require additional information and data sources, or if you should explore alternative paths.

Start with the End in Mind

The goal is getting to the facts of a case as quickly and as cost-effectively as possible. Technology that provides a multi-dimensional view of email allows you to develop the right questions, explore the answers, and discover more details. The power of email is realized through the combination of context and content, making it the most valuable data source for building compelling stories.

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Bob is an innovative problem solver and, as CEO of Mindseye, is responsible for the vision and leadership of the company. Over the past 14 years, he has played a key role in helping organizations address their growing concerns related to information. Bob has experience in all aspects of information discovery and, serving in both sales and consulting roles, has assisted companies in cases ranging from bet-the-company antitrust litigation and SEC investigations to internal and employment suits. He provides clients with innovative ways of establishing workflows, maximizing technology investments, and minimizing data volume by focusing on finding the key information that drives decisions that matter. In 2008, Bob co-founded Mindseye with two colleagues to create a technology company that provides companies with solutions to address growing data volumes by connecting the people who have knowledge with the information needed to make effective decisions. Under Bob's leadership, Mindseye has seen steady growth and is poised to change how companies view and manage their information. Contact Bob at bkrantz@mindseyesolutions.com or (888) 770-3876

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