



# **BUSTING** **THE** *ACTIVITY CHECK* **MYTH**

*As with many things, slow and steady wins the race.*

by Garrett McGinn  
*Director of Intelligence*



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*-Will Aaronson  
Founder*

“Activity checks are not true surveillance,” said Will Aaronson, Founder of DigiStream Investigations®, “they’re guessing and checking.” The statement had been made countless times before by Will and Field Operations Managers alike, frustrated by a common practice in the investigative industry: activity checks.

The concept of an activity check has been lurking around the investigative industry for decades. It seems logical enough. At the outset of a case, or anytime thereafter, simply allocate a portion of a day to “check” on the status of a subject in the hope of catching them active. This is generally limited to two hours. Clients who ask to split surveillance orders into half-days are operating under the same logic. The hope is that by splitting two days of surveillance authorization into four half-days, or splitting one day of surveillance into four spot-checks, the client is increasing their chance of obtaining useful video evidence. It is seen as a cost-effective way of going about investigations, something akin to spreading your bets on a roulette table in Vegas. The hope is that a few smaller bets will translate into better chances for surveillance results and therefore increased cost savings.

## BACKGROUND

The results point to a different story. Variables are involved in surveillance that reduce the effectiveness of spreading bets. The first variable is the increased risk of compromising the integrity of the case by doubling or quadrupling the number of times a surveillance investigator enters and exits a neighborhood. On a traditional two-day case, a surveillance investigator will enter a neighborhood twice, and depart a neighborhood twice. If that two-day case is split into four halves, the investigator is now entering and exiting a neighborhood a total of eight times. This doubles the risk of a negative case outcome without increasing the total amount of time spent surveilling a location. Even worse, splitting a full-day of surveillance into activity checks will quadruple that risk with no net gain in surveillance time. Experienced investigators know the surest way to compromise a case is by driving in and out of the area more than necessary. It tends to tip off the subject or their neighbors. In addition, most investigative companies including DigiStream must pass along the cost of the extra drive time to-and-from a case to the client, adding an additional cost with no benefit.

Second, in the absence of a full-day of surveillance, a subject's daily pattern of activity cannot easily be ascertained. As a result, subsequent days of surveillance are not built upon a firm foundation. How would an investigator know a subject goes for a daily jog at 2pm if the client insists they terminate a case at midday? Encouraged by the investing rationale of "cutting your losses," clients are misapplying this logic to a situation with little or no mathematical relationship.

## ANAYLSIS

DigiStream analyzed nine-years of case results from its surveillance database covering 16 out of 18 of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States. The total sample size included 75,453 surveillance cases resulting in 888,654 minutes of surveillance video captured by investigators across 36 of 50 states in the Union. The minute totals were then analyzed under three separate categories: 1) activity checks, 2) half-days and 3) full-days.

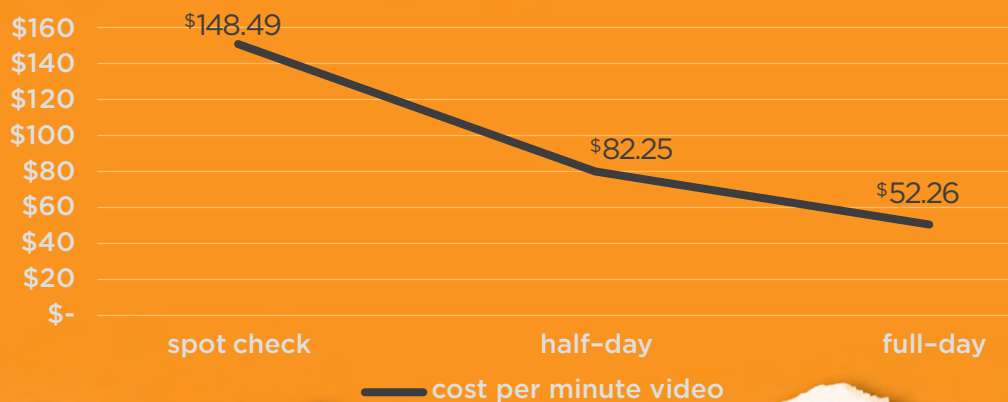
The results were adjusted to take into account activity checks that resulted in surveillance video and were subsequently upgraded to half- or full-days of surveillance. The same was done with half-days subsequently upgraded to full-days due to surveillance video obtained. This adjustment avoided a negative bias against activity checks and half-days of surveillance.



## RESULTS

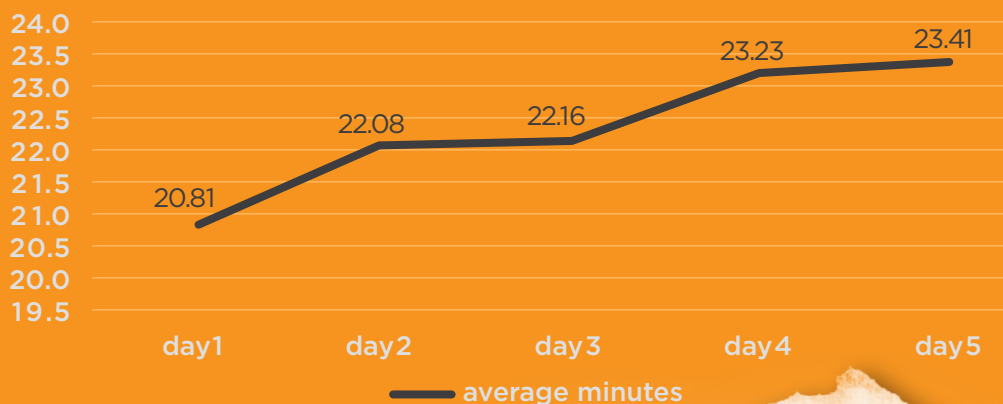
The results are telling. Activity checks resulted in an average of 2.66 minutes/day of surveillance, half-days resulted in 8.45 minutes/day of surveillance, and full-days resulted in 20.95 minutes/day of surveillance. When cost is factored into the equation, the ROI for full-days of surveillance becomes patently obvious, as evidenced by the graph below.

### COST PER MINUTE OF VIDEO DECLINES WITH ADDITIONAL TIME ON CASE



Not only are full-days of surveillance more effective, but each additional day of surveillance ordered after the first full-day increase the expected results, with efficiency gains seen up to the fifth day, after which they plateau.

### AVERAGE VIDEO MINUTES BY SURVEILLANCE DAY





## CONCLUSION

It has been 2½ millennia but the moral of Aesop's The Tortoise and the Hare still hold true. Slow-and-steady is best when it comes to surveillance, an art form that requires patience by nature. An overwhelming amount of data spanning nine years shows that clients are not successfully spreading bets or cutting losses by using activity checks or half-days of surveillance. Rather, they are simply paying more for less.

File this one under "Myth Busted."

