



BluemoonTM
Investigations

**I want to be a
Private Investigator**

by Keith Walker
founder of
Bluemoon Investigations Group

Someone once said:

Find a job you love and you'll
never work a day in your life

This is very true of the author who has spent over 30 years as a Private Investigator. I now devote my time to people who are seriously considering a career in the PI Industry.

It is of no consequence whether you have any investigative experience as all those new to the PI industry know nothing, or very little, when they first get involved.

The PI industry attracts people from all walks of life who have an array of different backgrounds. This "Introduction to becoming a Private Investigator" has been written for all from decades of practical experience and knowledge.

It is hoped that the following will give you an insight into the mysteries and myths of the world of the PI and give you some answers to yet to be asked questions.

Keith Walker

Professional Private Investigator

The Private Investigation Industry

Private Investigation is the second, oldest profession in history. It is based on information, intelligence gathering, the gaining of prior information before taking action.

As long as man can remember there has always been a “need to know” and a thirst for knowledge; indeed this is why you are reading this now.

You may have a perception about the PI industry that is completely different to reality as over the years PI's have been glamourised on TV, in films, books and in the media. Legends and myths have been spawned from these presentations. It is surprising how many people never realised that “Sherlock Holmes” and “James Bond” were inventions of someone's imagination. Yes, really!!!

The real PI industry in the UK is mainly made up of people just like you. They have learnt the art and craft, and now serve a customer base offering a myriad of services.

Throughout history, and even now, the PI industry has been self regulated. There is, presently, no requirement for formal qualifications and no requirement for a licence to set up as a PI.

In the near future the SIA (Security Industry Authority) will launch a Licensing Scheme, so that only those of good character who possess the knowledge and skills will be granted a license. This raises the standard of the PI Industry and will lead to the recognition of the true professionals who work in it.

These are exciting and changing times for the PI Industry and there has never been a better time to consider this as a career.

Getting started in the industry

The PI Industry is made up of Small and Large Investigations Companies, Sole Operators and specialist Investigations Companies.

So, how can *you* actually become a Private Investigator?

First you have to decide what, if any, knowledge and experience you already have. For instance, if you were a former Police Officer with specialised skills you would probably try and gain employment within an established company looking for those skills.

If, however, you have no investigation knowledge, skills or background you only have to ask yourself one question; “Do I want to work for a company or for myself?”

Either way you have to travel the same road. You will either have to find a company, or a practicing PI, who would be willing to take you on as a “Trainee”, or you have to start out on your own.

You will find it very difficult to get a trainee job if you have nothing to offer. Likewise if you intend to start out on your own you have to offer your services to a client base, and once again you have nothing to offer.

The author receives many calls from disillusioned and frustrated “newcomers” to the PI Industry because they seem to be going nowhere. The reasons can be many but the main two are that they started on their own and cannot get any work, or that they are “Trainees” within a PI Company that just uses them as a “runaround”.

If, however, they are fortunate enough to land the “Dream Job” with a bona fide PI Company which has a structured Training and Mentoring Programme it means that the PI Company is investing in you so that you the “newcomers” of today become the “Professionals” of tomorrow.

Underpinning knowledge

What is needed, whichever of the two you pursue, is for you to gather underpinning knowledge and understanding about what a PI actually does.

Let's assume that no-one is prepared to "take you under their wing" and teach you all they know, then you can gain underpinning knowledge before you "take the plunge".

You need to obtain as much underpinning knowledge as possible so you will have, at least, something to offer and you will understand the jargon.

It is understood that most people prefer learning in a classroom rather than solely from a book, I am such a person, so a Training Course has been put together which is "Classroom" based over a 4 day period usually Friday through Monday which gives minimum away time to present employment. This course is intense, practical and informative and the trainers are practising PI's of many years experience. Information about the Training Course can be found on

www.blumooncollege.co.uk

Many newcomers to the PI Industry try and get a "Work Experience" position or even offer to volunteer, free of charge, to work with a PI to learn a little. This is not something that is recommended as you will generally be taught little and very quickly disillusionment will set in, which is not a good start to your PI career.

You will also find that very few Private Investigators will offer work experience. Private Investigators handle highly confidential information and will generally not provide work experience opportunities for data security and insurance reasons.

Do your homework, gain knowledge, make a start. Experience and confidence will follow.

Fastrack to becoming a PI

You might like to “Fastrack” your venture into the PI Industry by looking at it from a business point of view.

How can you establish a business very quickly with all the training, support and advice available that you need?

The answer is to approach a well established Private Investigations Company that offers Franchises. For a modest sum you could be running your own PI Company under a well established name and receive all the training, support and advice you will ever need.

One such company is “Bluemoon Agencies Ltd” which is part of one of the largest PI Companies in the UK, and operates under the banner of “Bluemoon Investigations”



All their Franchisees were just like you. They had an interest in becoming a Private Investigator and looked at it as a business and realised that it was more cost effective to join a large organisation than “go it alone”.

In fact it has been proven that, for the right people, Franchising will bring the rewards in a fraction of the time it would take if you started on your own. It is realised, of course, that some people do not like to belong to a “Team”.

If this of any interest you will find information on their website
www.bluemoonagencies.com

Why become a PI ?

This is a question that the author has asked dozens of newcomers to the PI Industry. Here are some of the answers:

“I am very nosey and like to find things out, and it really appeals to me”

“I followed my friends spouse and found out about an affair and would like to do it for a living”

“I am a former Police Officer and need something to do”

“I would like to go around arresting people”

“My mate does a bit of PI work and I fancy a go; it sounds fun”

“I am always able to guess “whodunit” when I watch a mystery on TV or when I read a novel”

Everyone has a different reason for doing, or wanting to do, many things. The reason that you are reading this is because you have an interest in the PI Industry. But you have to be honest and ask yourself this question, “Why do I want to become a PI”

If it is any of the above answers, or similar, it is suggested that you consider another line of work.

Frequently Asked Questions

There are, of course, many other questions that are asked. I have listed the most Frequently Asked Questions, and answers, here.

Q. How do I set up a PI business?

- A. Whether you set up as a Sole Trader, a Limited Company or as a Franchisee of an already established PI Company there is one thing in common, you will need the services of an Accountant who should advise you the best way to set up an accounting system. This may vary from Accountant to Accountant as they have their own accounting methods. The Accountant should advise you on matters such as daily book keeping, vat, PAYE and NIC.

There is no special way to set up a PI business, as it is the same as for any type of business. There is more formal paperwork and record keeping if you trade as a Limited Company as well as there are additional obligations.

If you decide on buying into a Franchise you will probably find that the Franchisor will advise on the suggested methods of record keeping based on their methods. Remember that the Franchisor will have been operating a PI business for many years and will have fine tuned systems.

Q. What type of work should I do?

- A. This will depend upon what your level of knowledge is.

For instance, if you are just starting as a Sole Trader you will start with the basics that you will have learned from doing your homework prior to opening for business.

If you are part of a Franchise set up you will be able to handle a much larger range, and more complicated enquiries, as you will have the back up and support of a team of experienced investigators behind you.

Q. How do I get Clients?

- A. Like any business you have to advertise. You may not have any “Sales & Marketing” experience but logic dictates that for clients to know you wish to assist them you have to inform them that you are in business.

Always remember that Sales are the lifeblood of any business. There is no magic formula. What is needed is Application, Dedication, Belief and Hard Work.

You will need some kind of brochure, leaflet or flyer with your details printed. They need to be delivered to any potential client. You can deliver by hand or post them. The key is to actually do it.

Yellow Pages is another source of advertising, although this can be expensive. Local newspapers are always on the lookout for anything printworthy, so give them a call; they may give you some free editorial.

A website is an essential advertising medium. It is also essential that you subscribe to a PI Directory such as “Findadetective”.

www.findadetective.co.uk

As you gain experience and confidence you will start to examine other methods of advertising, but be warned that there are many who offer advertising who will sell you such but the returns will not be worth the expense.

Q. What Qualifications will I need?

- A. No matter what you have been told, or will be told the answer is simple – no Qualifications, at the present time, are needed to operate as a PI.

This will change sometime in 2011 when licensing is expected to be introduced. Keep an eye on the web site of the Security Industry Authority for further information:

www.the-sia.org.uk

Q. Do I need a License before I set up a PI business?

- A. No, not at the present time. But come 2011 you will need to have a licence to operate, as it is expected that it will be illegal then to be a PI without one.

Q. Will I be able to get enough work?

- A. You will be able to get as little, or as much, work as you can handle. What will determine this is your own abilities, experience and knowledge, coupled with the Sales & Marketing effort you employ. If you do little – you will get little.

Q. What kind of character traits should a PI have?

- A. In the PI Industry there are people from all walks of life and backgrounds. Above all they should be of good character. They should possess other traits such as honesty, integrity, compassion, empathy, discretion, good instincts, and good business sense.

Q. Do I need a vehicle?

- A. There are some who have tried to operate as a PI who did not have a Driving Licence or did not own a vehicle. They have not lasted very long.

It is impossible to operate as a PI if you cannot drive a vehicle, and have access to a vehicle. Many PI's have a car, motorcycle and a van that they use in surveillance operations. The only other option is that a driver is employed to cover anything that involves the requirement of a vehicle.

Q. What equipment will I need?

- A. You will need all the office requirements that an office needs, even if you operate from home.

As far as operational equipment is concerned there is a whole range of "Gadgetry and Wizardry" available from "Spy Stores" and from the Internet. But the bottom line is that you should only obtain this equipment as and when it is needed.

The basic equipment requirement for a PI is a Notebook and Pen, a good quality Torch such as a "Maglite", a good quality Digital Video camera that will also take Photographs, a decent pair of Binoculars and a Digital Audio Recording Device. Many a PI has gone through a whole career with nothing more than these items.

You might be tempted to go and buy the latest "gizmo". It will probably go on the shelf and stay there. Buy what you need and not what you want.

Q. Will I need an Office?

- A. This is a personal choice. Some PI's work from a physical office, some from Virtual Offices, and some from home.

Experience shows that a physical office is not needed for anything other than somewhere to work. However, it is recommended that if you work from home that a Virtual Office be considered, as there are obvious reasons why your home address should not be advertised.

You may have thought that you will need an office to interview clients. This is not the case. Once again from experience you will see very few clients. Those that you do see are more likely to be seen on their premises or in a neutral place. With a Virtual Office you can, if needed, rent an Interview Room by the hour. Why pay rent every month for something that you may not need.

One point to bear in mind. Not everyone has the discipline, or a dedicated work space, to work from home.

Q. Will I need Insurance of any sort?

- A. Yes you will require insurance. As you are operating in business you will, at least, require Public Liability Insurance. Other considerations are Professional Indemnity Insurance and a Policy that covers any equipment that may be used outside on an enquiry.

There have been times when a PI has been inside a property (such as a Public House) carrying out surveillance when his motor vehicle was broken into and all his equipment stolen. He had no insurance, so he lost the lot. There are Insurance Companies who offer insurance packages specially designed for the PI.

Q. How much should I charge clients?

- A. You must first find out what the average is for the area where you are. If you call other PI's in your area you will get an idea of what the average charges are. If you are a new Sole Operator do not try to compete with "Seasoned professionals", you will lose.

It may be that you have to charge lower fees to begin with and it would be a good idea to inform all other PI's in your area that you would be willing to work as part of their enquiry for part of the fee.

It maybe that you do not get welcoming responses from other PI's in your area, after all you are potential competition, do not be disheartened, they have obviously forgotten what it was like when they first started.

Q. Is there a minimum age to become a PI?

A. There is no minimum age requirement but it must be borne in mind that as the PI Industry is a "Service Supply" business that clients will look for experience. You cannot profess to be very experienced if you are in your teens. Although very young people have been seen to become PI's it must be said that they have not been taken seriously by either other PI's or clients; and those that stuck it out had a hard time of it. If, however you are part of a Large Organisation this obstacle can be overcome.

Q. Should I know how to use a PC and the Internet?

A. A PC is an essential tool for the PI as it can be used to produce Reports, Accounts and all other documents that are associated with the PI Industry and business in general. However, some of the "Old School" PI's have not kept up with technology and seem to struggle with today's electronic world of Commerce. A PC is also the gateway to the Internet which is a "Goldmine" of information and databases that are crucial to the PI.

Q. Will I have to give evidence in Court at any time?

A. You can be called to Court to give evidence, or answer questions. This is not something that is likely to happen but rarely. Make sure you prepare well. The new PI can get very anxious and nervous about appearing in court. Just be yourself and give evidence, or answer questions in a truthful manner. Many a PI has been discredited in the Courtroom because they have tried to be smart and have not been honest about the matter, their experience or knowledge.

Q. How much can I expect to earn in a year?

A. This depends solely on the amount of effort you are prepared to put into building your business. Do not expect to earn a lot if you give little.

If you are a new Sole Operator you should set yourself realistic goals. You should have devised a Business Plan before you started, and you should do all you can to adhere to this.

If you are part of a large organisation your earnings potential is a great deal higher as you will be able to handle large and complex enquiries that are of high value. (It is a matter of record that some first year Franchisees have earned in excess of £60k through hard work and application).

Q. Is there any paperwork involved?

- A. Yes. Every PI business has different procedures for recording and reporting work but a general procedure would be that all cases begin with instructions from a client that requires some kind of file to log the instructions and the activities planned. The enquiry may develop into notes or agents reports. There maybe photographs that need to be referenced, and finally a full written report along with an invoice to be sent to the client.

There is other Administration that needs to be done to keep control of how much money you are owed and what you owe. There will be bills and receipts to keep in some kind of order.

Some PI's keep files and records electronically and some maintain paper records, the choice is for you to make. But whichever you choose it all must be monitored and kept up to date.

Q. Do I have to join a PI Association?

- A. There is no requirement to join any Association as it is personal choice. There are a few Associations that you may join, and as they all offer something different you have to decide which one suits you.

Q. Can I get any Training?

- A. If you are a Franchisee with a PI Company you will receive all the Training, Support and advice that you will ever need, at no cost, as part of the Franchise Package.

If you are a Sole Operator there are various Training Providers who offer Training on Surveillance, Tracing Missing Persons and a whole range of specific subjects. These have to be paid for, and some training is quite expensive.

Many newcomers to the PI Industry think the PI's who have spent a lot of money and time learning the trade will just pass on that knowledge and "Tricks of the Trade". This is a myth as there are very few who will take

such a mentoring approach, and even fewer (if any) will do it for free. Why should they.

Being a Sole Operator means just that; you are on your own.

Q. What can I do if I get an enquiry that I know nothing about?

- A. This will happen very often and as a Sole Operator there is not much you can do. But you should be honest with yourself and realise that it is beyond your capabilities.

You could try and forge some kind of relationship with a PI in your area and negotiate a fee if you pass on any enquiry to that PI. Or you could ask if that PI would do the job on your behalf for a fee. In any event you ought to be involved, if you are allowed, in the enquiry so you can learn how such an enquiry is done.

If you are part of a Large Company you would simply pass this on and the matter would simply be dealt with along with your involvement as a matter of course as part of your on-going training.

Q. What happens if I accept an enquiry and then realise I can't do it?

- A. This is the quickest way to failure and loss of reputation and you will have to get another PI to sort this out for you and you will be disadvantaged the whole way.

It has been seen so many times that PI's have taken on more than their capability and who have promised much but who cannot deliver. Many a refund has been given back to the client with a loss of reputation for the PI because they thought they know more than they actually do.

The adage is "A little knowledge is highly dangerous". If you make the mistake of accepting something that is beyond you, then this could have serious consequences for your business, so do not put yourself in that position.

Q. Could I become a PI?

- A. Anybody with right qualities, desire and ambition can become a PI. The only thing preventing you, is you. All you have to decide is at what level you want to be at.

Is it for you ?

Having considered that you have the correct reason for joining the PI Industry, and have decided which route to take, whether it is gaining employment with an existing PI Company, starting out on your own or buying a Franchise from a well established PI Company, you could be involved in all manner of different enquiries.

- **Family relationships** - partner and matrimonial investigations, surveillance, electronic surveillance, divorce enquiries, finding hidden assets and property.
- **Other relationships** - adoption enquiries, domestic staff background checks, nanny cams, peace of mind enquiries.
- **Tracing** - missing persons, finding friends, tracing workmates, locating missing family, tracing adopted children, finding birth parents, recovery of abducted minors, finding missing pets and animals.
- **Solicitor support** - finding missing persons, tracing beneficiaries, probate enquiries, locating business assets, evidence gathering, matrimonial surveillance, process serving.
- **Business support** - test purchasing, security surveys, close protection, VIP protection, tracing absconding debtors, debt recovery, certificated bailiff service, polygraph lie detector tests.
- **Business intelligence** - due diligence enquiries, competitor intelligence, financial investigations, fraud examinations, lifestyle checks, employee sickness.
- **Background enquiries** - pre & post employment investigations, staff vetting, management vetting, CV checks, statements as to means, pre-sue status enquiries.
- **Claims investigations** - accident at work claims, fraudulent insurance claims, life insurance claims, RTA claims (Road Traffic Accidents), locus reports, theft of goods in transit, interviewing, witness statements.
- **Physical and electronic surveillance** - counter espionage investigations, internal loss (shrinkage) investigations, theft investigations, electronic surveillance counter measures.

Now you have read this it is hoped that now have an understanding of the PI Industry. If your appetite is thoroughly wetted then follow your interest, do not procrastinate, do it now because you have already taken the first step.

You could have a career in one of the most interesting jobs that can be imagined. It is not for everyone and far from routine. You will sometimes work long and unsociable hours but the rewards can be great.