In Any Language, Field Search Translates to Success

P arlez-vous Français? ¿Habla Español? Field Search does, as well as "speaking" any other language that uses the Latin alphabet.

In April 2012, the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) System's Corrections Technology Center of Excellence (CoE) released Version 4.0 of its Field Search suite via JUSTNET, the NLECTC System's website. Field Search, a free software product designed for use in the field by nontechnical criminal justice personnel, allows users to quickly and efficiently search a target computer and create a detailed report of the findings. Originally released in 2006 and developed with funding from the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice, Field Search can be launched from a USB drive and works live on a suspect computer to quickly find potential evidence such as Internet histories, images, multimedia files and results from text searches. The latest update includes a number of new features drawn from a "wish list" created by users.

"Our team is in contact with end users continuously," says CoE Director Joe Russo. "One of the highest priorities came from Canadian agencies who are using Field Search in a nationwide pilot and who really needed to access commands in both English and French. We've added an open-source software component that changes the interface language just by changing a few lines of XML code. Pictures, URLs, they're basically the same in any language, but users generally just feel more comfortable executing commands in their native language. This software will convert the commands to any language that uses the same alphabet as English: French, Spanish, Italian and so on."

Russo says that another high priority need identified by users involved the relatively new browser interface, Google Chrome.

"More and more people are moving to this as their browser of choice," he says. "It has about a 20-percent market share right now. The new version of Field Search can pull complete browser history from Google Chrome in the same way it can from older, established browsers such as Internet Explorer, Netscape, Firefox and Opera."

Other new features include:

- RegEditor tool. This tool helps users define registry keys to examine using Field Search. Many users know that there is something called a registry but have no idea where it is or what it does, Russo says. Windows stores a great deal of information about user behavior in the registry and if properly extracted, this information can often make or break a case.

- Media file support. The new release recognizes and views more than 20 different video formats, vastly expanding its ability to detect inappropriate/illegal video files.

- GUI (Graphical User Interface). Reorganization of the GUI interface made it more intuitive and visually separated basic functions from more advanced ones, including the addition of the capability to display different languages mentioned above.

- Improved report functions.

- Improved and expanded media file handling.

- Overall improved speed.

Russo says that none of these improvements would have been possible without the volunteer efforts of two individuals: Dr. Jim Tanner of KBSolutions and Jim Persinger of PM Investigations. Tanner, a nationally recognized expert in a number of areas including computer forensic investigations and sex offender management, served as project coordinator and software designer for the original version, which Persinger, a certified forensic examiner, commercial software developer and private investigator, developed. Tanner and Persinger did all of the work on the new version on their own time.

Since its original launch, the various versions of Field Search have been downloaded more than 10,000 times, and Russo says that "users consistently tell us that Field Search is user friendly and has proven invaluable in supporting violations and providing evidence to pursue new criminal charges against sex offenders and others."