



Selecting a Private Investigation Team

Licensing:

In SC and most other states, Private Investigators must be licensed. Licensing requirements vary, but rarely do they provide any guarantee of quality.

Insurance:

All Private Investigators should have liability (or E&O) insurance. Don't be afraid to ask about this, and to require proof if you have any doubts. A professional PI will understand this concern and willingly provide you with this information.

Education:

No formal education is required to be a PI in SC. While college or advanced degrees are not necessary, they reflect understanding of commitment and sense of responsibility, both of which are important characteristics for any professional. When looking for a PI, consider whether their educational background gives them specialized knowledge that could be applied to your specific case. If the investigator will be required to blend in with certain people or groups to complete the investigation, level of education can be an important factor.

Professionalism:

PI's are professionals. Consider whether the PI you are considering holds himself out as a professional. Does he speak, write and conduct himself professionally? Does he have a website? Is it well-organized and free of spelling and grammatical errors? Does he pay attention to detail? Does he dress professionally? Does he have an established office? Is his office well-organized? Is he on time? Does he return your call promptly? Trust your instincts: *Do you trust him? Do you have reservations about referring your clients to him? Would you be comfortable having him appear in Court on behalf of your client?*

Longevity:

How long has the PI been in business? Is he or his firm investing in the community through Chambers of Commerce, the Better Business Bureau, charity sponsorships, or other civic commitments? Does the PI or firm have experience with the type of case you are working on? How much? How sure are you that the firm and the people who worked on your case will still be there a year or two in the future?

Size:

If you are considering a large national firm, how long have they served your community? How effective have they been? What kind of customer service do they provide? How do you know

who will be working on your case? Are there advantages to having a national firm in your particular case? Is the cost significantly higher than hiring a local PI, and if so, is it worth it? Is it significantly less costly, and if so, why, and is it worth it?

If you are looking at a solo PI or a small firm (less than 4 investigators), how long has the firm been established? Can they handle multiple cases at once, and if so, how? What support staff does the firm have? Have others used them and recommended their services to you? How will they maintain contact with you and your client? Who will testify if the firm goes out of business before your case comes up for trial? A long-established solo/small firm PI with a solid reputation may well be the best choice, but much caution should be exercised.

If you are looking at a mid-size firm (4-8 investigators), look for strong management and a sense of teamwork among the employees. A firm this size should certainly have an established office, an administrative assistant, and its own stock of specialized equipment. You should be able to speak directly with the owner of the firm, and there should be no difficulty reaching someone who is working on your case. The firm's senior investigators should have college degrees and be capable of guiding, training, supervising and directing junior investigators. A firm this size should also be willing to invest in the community, so look for memberships in professional organizations, Chambers of Commerce, and the Better Business Bureau.

Technology:

Does the firm you are considering have access to specialized equipment? Any established, professional PI or firm will have invested in the equipment needed to perform investigations quickly and efficiently. Ask what equipment the firm has in stock and ask to see it – if a solo or small firm PI hesitates or merely states he has “access” when needed, he probably rents it. A large national firm should have a brochure detailing the kinds of equipment they have available.

Reputation:

Last, but certainly not least, consider the firm's reputation. What experiences have others had with the firm? What specifically did they like? Not like? Ask your fellow attorneys, as well as friends and family. And of course, ask the PI – if they can provide references, check them out or have an assistant do so.

Provided by:

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