

How Digital Evidence Can Be a Game-Changer

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Investigating in a #MeToo World

**The Private
Investigator
and the Client:
A Collaborative
Partnership**

**The Art
& Science of
Communication**



Vaudra International

In this issue of PI Magazine, we are pleased to feature Randy and Tamara Rabenold, owners of Vaudra International, located in Huntersville, North Carolina. The company name originated from the French verb, “valoir,” meaning “to be worth.”

Vaudra’s company principles and investigative focus are aimed at protecting and supporting the worth of their clients’ businesses and intellectual property. These types of investigations take many forms such as investigating the sale and distribution of fake, stolen or diverted products to identify the involved parties; determining a company’s priority for a trademark; anonymously acquiring and negotiating the purchase of a domain on behalf of a client; or developing and running anti-counterfeiting enforcement programs to protect a brand’s IPR worldwide.

Graduating from Kutztown University with a Criminal Justice degree, Randy Rabenold served in the U.S. Secret Service (his lifelong dream), and excelled, but became frustrated with the politics, before being recruited into a seven-year career opportunity with Ryan Homes and then Toll Bros. in the Philadelphia area. In the early 1990s, he missed and returned to his criminal justice and security roots. He started his IPR investigative career with Colt Investigations, an intellectual property (IP) firm in Charlotte, NC.

After over 20 years of investigations and traveling around the world on cases, Randy co-founded Vaudra International (originally Vaudra Ltd.) with his then business partner, Howard Dozier in 2003.

Meanwhile, Tamara (Tarbutton) Rabenold was working for a marketing and design agency since graduating from Winthrop University with a degree in Integrated Marketing Communications.

When Randy and Howard opened Vaudra’s office across the hall from her employer, Tamara was eager to meet the two PIs and offer services to brand their new business. Over the next few months, she learned about the IP industry and Vaudra’s niche, which she found completely enthralling, as she helped develop the company’s first website and promotional materials. When an opportunity arose to interview for an investigator position, she jumped at it, was offered the job, and began her career as Vaudra’s first female IPR PI. Tamara never



Randy Rabenold



Tamara Rabenold

anticipated that her passion for branding would develop into a profession dedicated to protecting brands and the related company’s intellectual property rights (IPR).

In just a few months, she was investigating a counterfeit manufacturer in China on behalf of a brand owner. One of her favorite parts of an investigation is working undercover, which came naturally to her, building rapport and talking with the “bad guys” to develop intel. As a result of her efforts on this case, Tamara’s investigation gained traction and resulted in a significant seizure of counterfeit goods for their client. At that point, she “made her bones” with Vaudra and the client.

After Howard retired, Randy bought him out and the company continued to thrive, growing its reputation for quality IP investigations and related enforcement for product manufacturers and their counsel. In addition to investigations, Tamara assisted with operations and client management, and she and Randy’s relationship grew in the years that followed. They were married in 2015.

PI: PI Magazine

TR: Tamara Rabenold

PI: What is unique about your agency?

TR: Within our investigative specialties, we are not geographically limited to investigating subjects only located in North Carolina. It may raise your blood pressure about licensing, but we effectively conduct these investigations without leaving the state. Initially, it can be a hard sell to a new client who has a counterfeit problem in Los Angeles, Dhaka or Shenzhen, but it’s standard operations for us. We are trained and experienced in these “long-arm” investigations, securing the necessary evidence and intel without the expense of hiring a subcontractor. Should the need arise, we have a network of resources to assist on the ground and by that point, we have substantive findings to better inform the tasks and justify the potential cost.

PI: Who were/are your mentors?

TR: As a young investigator, I looked up to Randy, who did the bulk of training for all investigators at the company. I respected (and still respect) his ability to talk to subjects of investigations and his flair for undercover investigations. He has taught us to ‘go around the problem’ and look at it differently to find unique solutions when we hit a wall with a subject.

VAUDRA INTERNATIONAL – INVESTIGATIONS & BRAND PROTECTION SOLUTIONS

Owners: Randy & Tamara Rabenold

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Phone: 704-895-3939 & toll-free: 855-272-6347 [BRAND.IP]

Email: tdt@vaudra.com

Years in Business: 16

Number of Employees: 6

Licensed in: North Carolina (with reciprocity in several other states)

Investigation Specialties: Intellectual property and corporate investigations

Company Mission Statement: To deliver high-quality, fact-based investigations and customized solutions with a customer-centric approach, while maintaining investigative standards that are moral, ethical, and respectful of all parties' constitutional rights.

Association Memberships: North Carolina Association of Private Investigators (NCAPI), World Association of Detectives (WAD), InfraGard Charlotte Chapter, International Trademark Association (INTA), Automotive Aftermarket Suppliers Association (AASA) & AASA's IP Council

Website: <https://www.vaudra.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vaudraintl/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/vaudra>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/vaudraintl>



With the majority of our investigations being conducted online and using undercover means, we incorporate creativity in our approaches to obtain information (while also always obtaining it ethically and legally). Even as roles have changed and we're running the company together now, I continue to learn from him.

PI: What changes have you seen in our profession since you started?

TR: Technology has always played a role, but it has grown in value and importance over the past 15 years with the increase in OSINT resources and popularity of social media worldwide. As we regularly investigate companies and individuals overseas, the chances are very good that we will locate valuable intel online on these parties, when this was not as often the case 15 years ago. The web has made the world a much smaller place.

PI: What has been your most successful marketing tool?

TR: Word-of-mouth marketing from satisfied clients and referrals are the most successful tools for us. We focus on growing relationships with our clients and have worked with many of them for more than five years, some for over 10. Everyone knows that it is much easier to retain an existing client than to find a new one. Building rapport, providing a quality product, positive experience, and earnestly helping that

client find answers on the first case often paves the way to that next case.

A challenge when marketing to new clients, and existing ones who may not use our services very often, they don't hire a PI (or necessarily even think about it) until there is a need. We aim to build top-of-mind awareness to be the first PI they think of when that need strikes. We strive to achieve this through a number of avenues, including e-newsletters, social media and personalized contacts to our current and prospective clients. We regularly attend IP industry conferences where we will arrange in-person meetings with existing clients, prospects and meet & network with others in the industry. As there can be a long sales cycle in some instances, I find it immensely helpful to have a CRM where we track our contacts, proposals, meetings, etc.... so we know when we last interacted with a particular client or prospect in order to build on that relationship.

PI: What advice do you give to prospective PIs?

TR: Join the industry (and state) associations that are of interest to you and get involved! I have met wonderful people, found new resources and made friends through my volunteer work with the North Carolina Association of Private Investigators (NCAPI). I encourage those new to the profession to network with other PIs and build a database of resources that you are com-

fortable referencing when you have questions, need help in another state/country or have a case that requires an expertise that you don't possess. You don't need to know how to do everything – you just need to know a resource who does. Some of the most successful PIs in the business leverage their network to help get tasks assigned and cases worked. We readily employ this tactic when an investigation requires something outside our wheelhouse, or make a direct referral if it makes more sense to efficiently achieve the end objective. In either instance, the client is better served and comes back because they know that we do our best to take care of them.

PI: Is there anything else you want our readers to know about your agency?

TR: We are always looking for new connections and to build synergies with other investigators and firms – whether you may offer complementary services to a similar client base, have a particular niche or provide something completely different. We enjoy collaboration and building relationships that benefit and enrich all involved. While our specialty is IP and corporate investigations, we have the experience, technical proficiency and equipment to assist on other matters as well. If you are seeking assistance in our area or want to discuss how or if we may be able to assist you, please reach out. **PI**