

INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS USES NUIX TO ANALYZE THE LARGEST DATA LEAK EVER

The leak of more than 2.5 million confidential files to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) exposed the previously secret offshore financial activities of over 120,000 companies, politicians, financial criminals and wealthy individuals in over 170 countries. It was the leak of a lifetime for any investigative journalist, but sifting through the gigabytes of information presented a logistical nightmare.

Nuix's eDiscovery technology helped solve these problems by:

- Making available for analysis millions of spreadsheets, documents, emails and other unstructured data in many different formats and languages.
- Generating network diagrams to visualize relationships between people and data.
- Removing duplicates and other irrelevant data.
- Enabling 86 journalists in 46 countries and 38 media organizations to analyze the data collaboratively.



CHALLENGE

It's not every day that a journalist gains access to a gold mine of previously secret information. Imagine receiving a hard drive detailing millions of financial transactions into and out of offshore accounts, some of which global power brokers used for money laundering, tax evasion and embezzling state funds.

That's exactly what happened to International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) director Gerard Ryle in early 2011. The Australian investigative journalist received a hard drive containing more than 2.5 million files, documenting the offshore financial activities of more than 120,000 companies and trusts in more than 170 countries.

ICIJ needed to analyze and cross-match 260 gigabytes of data—including spreadsheets, documents and emails—to expose shady dealings for publication. To complement the skills of investigative journalists around the world, the organization needed a way to make sense of the unprecedented mass of data and unlock the secrets it contained.

Many holders of offshore accounts are engaged in legitimate transactions and seek to do business in entrepreneur-friendly zones without the heavy rules and red tape of their local economies.

“Just because someone appears in the data, it does not mean they are criminals,” said Ryle. “Most of what we looked at was perfectly legal, which made it a considerable challenge to identify examples of wrongdoing.”

In addition, individual transactions might not reveal specific incriminating activities, but cross-matching large numbers of them would enable investigative journalists to establish worldwide money trails, and discover and document the relationships between the perpetrators.

SOLUTION

ICIJ turned to Nuix's expertise in large-scale unstructured data analysis. Nuix provided software and training to ICIJ at no charge, as part of the software maker's program of donating products to worthy causes such as not-for-profit organizations, universities and child protection agencies.

Using Nuix eDiscovery Workstation at research desks in Spain, England, Romania and the United States, investigative journalists consolidated the leaked data into a single repository. They then analyzed this data to pick out incriminating evidence and leads to be followed up in person. To date, some 86 journalists from 46 countries have participated in the investigation, many using Nuix analysis and visualization tools to build evidence and identify genuine leads.

“Nuix software has been invaluable for its ability to remove duplicates, generate relationship diagrams, and see at a glance what information can be gleaned from the data,” said Ryle. “And Nuix as a company has been a great partner in the effort, providing training and ongoing support to ensure we are making the most of its powerful tools.”

THE LARGEST DATA LEAK EVER

- 2.5 million files covering 30 years of activities
- 120,000 companies and trusts in more than 170 countries
- 86 journalists from 46 countries involved
- More than 160 times the volume of data than the U.S. State Department cables given to Wikileaks in 2010



Figure 1: ICIJ's revelations made headlines around the world. (Image courtesy of ICIJ.)

RESULTS

Two years of investigative effort has delivered a continuous flow of revelations about the previously unknown activities of a wide range of public figures and institutions.

“The breadth and depth of this information is unprecedented in modern investigative journalism,” said Ryle. “By cross-matching the information we received, Nuix eDiscovery has been invaluable in helping us uncover a wealth of previously unknown financial activities.”

ICIJ has so far revealed:

- Individuals and companies linked to Russia’s Magnitsky Affair.
- A Venezuelan deal-maker accused of bankrolling a US-based Ponzi scheme and bribing a Venezuelan government official.
- Indonesian billionaires with ties to the late, corrupt dictator Suharto.
- An Azerbaijani mogul awarded billions of dollars from construction contracts while managing offshore companies for the President of Azerbaijan’s daughters.
- Potential involvement by the daughter of Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos in her father’s corrupt activities. Her father was estimated to have embezzled \$US5 billion through corruption.

“Our work has prompted numerous national governments to begin their own investigations into some of their wealthiest and most powerful citizens,” Ryle said.

“We couldn’t have done any of this without Nuix.”

Rapid access to all unstructured data

Using Nuix eDiscovery allowed the ICIJ team to index and analyze the many different data structures and file types contained in the leaked information. Nuix helped investigators deduplicate and consolidate the data into a single repository that provided access to all the unstructured data stored in the more than 2.5 million leaked files.

“The Nuix interface made it really easy to identify and analyze the content of the data,” Ryle said. “We were able to parcel out work to different investigative reporters around the world, to overcome language issues and then collaborate on the results. Sometimes we didn’t know who the people we identified were, but local journalists came along and filled in the gaps.”

Visualization of transfers and business relationships

Because of the sheer volume of information received, it would have been extremely difficult for investigators to manually process and efficiently act on the information. The visualization capabilities built into the Nuix eDiscovery platform created visual matrices documenting the path of email correspondence, global networks of relationships, and more.

“Network diagrams are a really powerful way to illustrate the underlying trends behind the data,” Ryle said. “From the first training session in January 2012, Nuix has been pivotal in the effort to make sense of the data in this largest leak ever.”

Fulfilling ICIJ’s mission of transparency

Nuix eDiscovery’s ability to draw out facts from a mass of unstructured data has put it front and center in the global effort to document the use of offshore accounts. This effort reflects the core values of ICIJ, which was founded in 1997 by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Public Integrity (CPI).

ICIJ is focused on exposing cross-border crime, corruption and the accountability of power and now involves more than 170 journalists from more than 60 countries. However, despite significant success so far, the full effort is certain to last for many years as new revelations produce more leads for the journalists to pursue.

“We couldn’t have done any of this without Nuix,” Ryle said. “We’re still looking at new countries every day, and the best may yet come.”

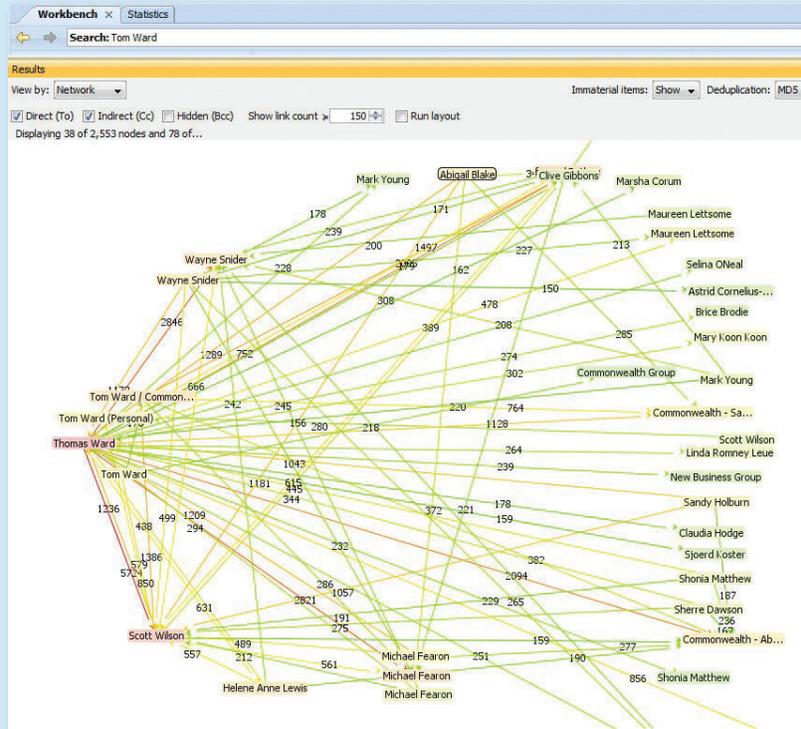


Figure 2: ICIJ used Nuix software to trace complex webs of interaction across huge data sets.

ABOUT NUIX

Nuix is a worldwide provider of information management technologies, including eDiscovery, electronic investigation and information governance software. Nuix customers include the world's leading advisory firms, litigation support providers, enterprises, government departments, law enforcement agencies, and all of the world's major corporate regulatory bodies.

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) was founded in 1997 by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Public Integrity to focus on cross-border issues of crime, corruption, and the accountability of power. It allies more than 170 reporters in more than 60 countries to collaborate in teams on in-depth investigations that have resulted in a broad range of investigative journalism awards.