



# The ROI of Automated OSINT: Investigating Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking

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## The ROI of Automated OSINT: Investigating Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking



Law enforcement agencies—from local police departments to federal task forces—are under mounting pressure to combat organized crime groups (OCGs) involved in the trafficking and manufacture of deadly drugs like fentanyl. These criminal networks operate across state lines and international borders, making disruption difficult yet critical—in 2023, overdoses [claimed over 100,000 lives](#) in the U.S. alone, as law enforcement works tirelessly to combat their devastating effects.

However, investigating OCGs is resource-intensive and time-consuming, causing delays in prosecution and missed opportunities to prevent further crimes. This is where open-source intelligence (OSINT) comes into play. By gathering and analyzing publicly available data, officers and analysts can develop detailed profiles and network visualizations of OCG members, leading to a more complete understanding of their operations and stronger support for criminal prosecutions.

Automating these tasks can significantly reduce the time and effort required to complete them. Law enforcement can then investigate faster, more efficiently, and with greater accuracy. The ability to act quickly and decisively is essential in the fight against organized crime because the sooner law enforcement can act, the fewer crimes these groups can commit, and the more lives can be saved.

But how can law enforcement demonstrate the true value of these tools to public sector decision-makers who control the budget? In this ROI-focused blog, we'll explore how to determine the value of an OSINT solution for law enforcement teams investigating OCGs involved in fentanyl trafficking.

### What is ROI and Why Does it Matter to Law Enforcement?

ROI stands for Return on Investment. While budget constraints are a significant concern for many departments and agencies, the value of their investments usually goes beyond just saving money. For law enforcement, ROI means ensuring that resources and tools are used to improve operational efficiency, save lives, and ultimately, increase public safety.

In the context of drug trafficking, particularly the [distribution of synthetic opioids like fentanyl](#), every minute wasted can mean lives lost. Luckily, automated OSINT can lead to faster investigations, faster prosecutions, and a reduction in overall crime. In a world where every second counts, automated OSINT can help protect communities more effectively.

Want to read more about how OSINT can help prevent the spread of deadly drugs? Download our [OSINT Workflows for Fentanyl Trafficking](#) guide.

## Real-World Example: Law Enforcement Organized Crime Team

Investigations aimed at dismantling organized crime groups require detailed information on key players—whether they are traffickers, facilitators, or beneficiaries of the criminal network. Investigating a drug trafficking operation is time-consuming, challenging work, often requiring specialized units to investigate them.

In a recent case handled by the Organized Crime Task Force of a major police department in the Northeastern United States, investigators were tasked with dismantling a multi-state fentanyl trafficking ring. This task force, comprised of detectives and intelligence analysts, is responsible for every aspect of the investigation, including all OSINT work to support the case. For this particular operation, the team faced the following scenario:

- **15 entities** who are linked to trafficking or money laundering
- A comprehensive **link chart** showing connections between these entities

### Manual OSINT Process:

- **Eight hours** to build a subject profile
- **Five hours** to build a business profile
- **30 hours** to create a detailed link chart of the criminal network

These time estimates are based on real-world experience from our in-house experts and former law enforcement intelligence analysts, reflecting complex cases requiring extensive research across multiple data sources.

### Automated OSINT Process:

With an automated OSINT platform, the entire process is drastically shortened:

- **12–17 minutes** to create profiles of relevant entities, including **10 to 15 minutes** for refinement and review
- **30 seconds** to create a detailed link chart of the criminal network, plus **15 minutes** to review

In this scenario, the total time the team needs to build **17 entity focused intelligence reports** and a **link chart** is reduced from **160 hours** using manual techniques to around **4 hours** with an automated OSINT platform.

## Quantifying ROI in the Public Sector

For public sector decision-makers, the value of automated OSINT includes but also goes beyond time and cost savings. Here's how the ROI of automating OSINT shows up for law enforcement:

## 1. Operational Efficiency

An operation involving a manual investigation into 15 subjects, two businesses, and a link chart would take approximately **160 hours**, but with automation, this is reduced to **four hours**. If law enforcement personnel typically cost an average of **\$50 per hour**, that unlocks **\$8,000** per investigation that can be redirected to other tasks, such as attending crime scenes, gathering intelligence, conducting interviews, and analyzing content from electronic devices. For a task force working on **10 major operations a year**, automation could free up **\$80,000** worth of working hours alone—time that can then be allocated to high-priority cases, patrols, or community engagement.

## 2. Enhanced Community Safety

When OCGs are involved in trafficking drugs like fentanyl, time is of the essence. Every additional day the network remains operational increases the risk of further harm to the community—such as overdoses, violent crimes, and financial exploitation. Manual OSINT investigations might limit a team to handling **a maximum of ten operations** a year due to the time required for manual profiling and link analysis. With automation, teams can work **3x more cases** in the same time frame, significantly increasing the impact of law enforcement efforts on organized crime.

## 3. Better Outcomes

Manual investigation methods are prone to human error, especially when data from multiple sources must be evaluated. Automated OSINT tools increase the accuracy of intelligence in products like intelligence reports and link charts by rapidly correlating diverse data points. This reduces the likelihood of false positives and missed connections and increases the chances of a successful prosecution.

### See the Results for Yourself

Following the example above, law enforcement teams can calculate the benefits of automating OSINT workflows. For departments and agencies dealing with complex criminal investigations, investing in automated OSINT provides the return of safer, more secure communities.

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