

Checking criminal records via phone proves popular

October 27 2011, The Philadelphia Inquirer

Matthew Haindfield's little app is quite revealing. A few minutes with Docket in Your Pocket brought me up to date with the legal scrapes of various acquaintances and left my own sordid record of traffic offenses staring back at me from the smartphone screen.

"It was definitely a surprise," Haindfield told me - not my speeding and red-light tickets turning up on his [app](#), but his discovery that Docket in Your Pocket seems to have a following beyond its original intended audience of lawyers like himself.

That following, he said, includes single women checking on boyfriends' backgrounds, parents investigating nannies, cops on the beat, and [college students](#) looking up their [roommates](#).

Enter a name and the app searches the databases of Pennsylvania criminal and magisterial district cases going back to 2000. Results - case information including dates, charges and dispositions - are displayed against a simple background drawing of a denim pocket.

The app, available for \$2.99 at the Apple App Store and Android Market, rolled out officially this week, although it's been available for months and has sold thousands of copies in what Haindfield considered a shakedown phase. And for now, it only pulls records from Pennsylvania courts. A weekly update strips newly expunged cases from the database, he said.

Haindfield, of Des Moines, Iowa, said he founded Docket in Your Pocket Enterprises last year and focused first on Pennsylvania, because the Commonwealth has plenty of smartphone users and its public records were relatively easy to tap into.

Anybody can look up Pennsylvania criminal-docket entries for free at the state court's [web portal](http://web.portal.ujspportal.pacourts.us), ujspportal.pacourts.us. In addition, Philadelphia Common Pleas Court has a free Android app, called iFJD (for First Judicial District), that displays docket entries and hearing schedules.

Haindfield, 40, said he thought at first that he was making an app for fellow attorneys. The idea came to him while he was feverishly tapping his smartphone during a break in a deposition to chase down the background of a witness in the next room.

"It was cumbersome and clunky and just didn't work in a mobile environment," he said of the search.

Do the dockets threaten individuals' privacy? Haindfield said he's received complaints, but he defends the app as "just the latest iteration" in public-record accessibility, and, "We think the public's benefited."

Docket in Your Pocket searches 32.5 million Pennsylvania criminal records, Haindfield said. But he's got his sights on other states and on eventually including Pennsylvania civil-court records, which he thinks will take six months or more to negotiate access to on a county-by-county basis.

Then we'll know with a tap who's suing whom.

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