

MEMO TO ISB INVESTIGATORS

SUBJECT: MASTER KEYS

A client recently sent me a Strategic Alert sent out to member companies by NICB. The subject of the alert is "Obtaining 'Master Keys' over the internet."

My follow-up at the WWW URLs listed in the alert reveals that in fact a company named Two Seven Inc. is selling pick keys, which they call Master keys, for \$25.00 for each of four manufacturers - Honda, Nissan, Toyota and Chrysler. Their advertisement indicates that each set includes instructions for use.

The term Master Key does not apply to these keys or to any of the pick, try out, jiggle or lockout keys which have been available for sale for years.

As it correctly applies to locks, the term Master key applies only to a set of locks which have been prepared to accept more than one combination of key cuts.

The landlord of an apartment building will have each of the locks in the building structured to fit a master key which he retains and a unique key that will actuate only one of the locks.

In an automotive application, for example, a master key for a specific car will operate all of the car's locks whereas the valet key will not open the glove box or the trunk. There is no other correct terminology for a master key in the automotive world.

As always, the condition of the ignition lock of a recovered theft is only one aspect of the overall condition of the car. All aspects of its condition must be evaluated in light of one another - including the possibility of third party involvement. In many cases the complete absence of ignition lock damage or tampering supports a theft as opposed to refuting it - depending on the condition of the rest of the car.

Because the vehicles for which the so called Master Keys are being sold have always been vulnerable to pick, jiggle, shaved and modified keys, nothing has changed except that an attorney representing a car owner now has a NICB Strategic Alert to wave in front of a judge.

Be prepared to explain the importance of the overall evidence as it relates to the condition of the ignition lock and the claim.

Motive is often subordinate to Means and Opportunity in a theft investigation but **should not** be. Be prepared to answer the Why question as well as the Why not.