FISHMAN RESEARCH TECHNOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Sample Stolen-Property Marketplace and Registry Search

Illustrative sample, details changed

A public-source search for serialized, higher-value musical instruments reported stolen. Prepared as an FRTA portfolio sample. Not a police report and not legal advice.

SAMPLE PORTFOLIO DELIVERABLE. Names, places, amounts, dates, and other identifying details have been changed or generalized. This is not a document from a real client matter. It is not legal advice.

Illustrative sample, details changed. The reporting party, the investigating agency, report numbers, serial numbers, exact models, listing addresses, seller handles, photographs, calendar dates, and dollar figures that could identify the matter have been removed or generalized.

Purpose and limits

The work was a read-only public search to see whether instruments from an owner list had appeared in online marketplaces, public stolen-property registries, or related indexes. The reporting party had already made a police report. The search was designed to support that investigation, not to replace it.

- No sellers were contacted, messaged, flagged, or replied to. Nothing was posted, purchased, or registered on any site. No accounts were created for this work.
- If a possible listing appeared, the package — saved addresses, screenshots, and seller location — was to be handed to the investigating agency. The owner was not advised to approach a seller as a private buyer, even when a listing looked close.
- Verified means a source page or a local copy was opened or searched on that pass. Inferred means a serial format was dated from published manufacturer or dealer patterns, not from a factory lookup of that exact instrument.
- No public hits found means no listing, sold record, or registry entry was found that carried that exact serial. It is not proof the instrument is unlisted. Web indexes of major used-instrument marketplaces, classifieds, local sale apps, and pawn sites are incomplete, and several sites blocked direct retrieval.

How the list was prepared

The owner provided a written inventory of serialized, higher-value instruments, plus a shorter description-only list without serials. Owner photographs named in the materials were not available on the first pass, so visual matching against listing photos was not performed at the outset. Descriptions were taken from the written list. A few earlier assumptions about instrument type were corrected before the search was treated as final — for example, one item first read as a six-string guitar was confirmed as a short-scale bass, and one serial that looked like a common guitar prefix was confirmed as a branded bass. Those corrections were written down so later passes used the right search terms.

Method

Pass 1 — open web, marketplaces, and public registries (Month 1)

- Each priority serial was searched as a quoted string, with typo and spacing variants, on the open web and with site-limited queries on major used-instrument and auction marketplaces, discussion boards, and public stolen-instrument registries.
- Distinctive description phrases (body shape, finish, pickup and hardware color, string count, and unusual custom features such as a name inlay) were searched in addition to serials, especially for the item that had no serial in the source file.

• Public registry sites were downloaded or opened where they allowed it, then searched for the serials. A law-enforcement-only pawn and secondhand-goods database was identified but could not be queried from a public session; that step was left for the investigating agency.

• Where a direct page fetch was blocked or returned an error, the limit was recorded rather than treated as a negative finding. Login-walled marketplaces and sold-listing archives were noted as incomplete.

• Serial formats were decoded only as inferences from published patterns (for example, a plant prefix plus a two-digit year). Those year readings were labeled inferred.

• False positives were logged and set aside: overlapping industrial part numbers, software bug identifiers, vehicle registrations, model-name collisions, and internal registry record numbers that were not instrument serials. One site that used a “stolen” word in its address proved to be unrelated social content, not a registry.

Pass 2 — regional classifieds and a local sale app (later in Month 1)

• A follow-up pass searched public classifieds across the home metro and about a dozen neighboring and regional metros, using postal-code centering and a set radius so results were not silently defaulted to the wrong city.

• Queries included brand-family keywords, distinctive description phrases, and every exact serial, in both a general search path and a music-instrument category where the site provided one. Several hundred queries were run in that pass. All of those requests succeeded. A few hundred unique ads were collected, including ordinary keyword noise.

• Promising ads were opened. Listing photographs were saved and inspected, with enlargements of headstock or neck-plate photos where a serial or a distinctive top might be visible.

• A parallel pass on a local sale app, still read-only and without an account, opened several dozen listings and reviewed a few hundred still photographs. One query was auto-corrected by the site to an unrelated spelling and had to be forced back to the original words.

• Verdicts used a fixed scale: Possible — close enough to the written description that the owner or the investigating agency should look, but not a serial-confirmed recovery. Unlikely — same general category, with a documented mismatch. Ruled out — a hard conflict such as the wrong body shape, string count, factory, color, or a readable serial that was not the stolen one.

• Classifieds generally do not expose sold or expired ads in the live search. A separate web-index sweep was used only to look for older copies of distinctive ads. Index coverage is incomplete.

Finding types

Exact serials, first pass

For the serialized priority items — a mix of electric guitars and basses, including striped and light-finished solid-body guitars, a pale yellow-finish solid-body guitar, a graphic-finish guitar, a cherry solid-body, a commemorative jazz-style bass, a dark-finish branded bass, a compact imported boutique bass, a short-scale Club-style bass with three gold-covered pickups, and a five-string USA boutique bass with a custom name inlay — no public listing, sold record, or registry entry was found that carried those exact serials. Unrelated look-alikes (other stolen instruments already on a registry, current dealer stock with later serials, or parts guitars) were checked and were not these instruments.

A possible descriptive match in regional classifieds

One cluster of live ads in a nearby metro was a real possible match for a four-string amber figured-top boutique bass that had no serial in the source materials. It was not the five-string bass with the name inlay: the ad showed four strings, standard block inlays, and no visible name.

• The same bass was advertised in two nearby cities. The stated years of manufacture did not agree. Asking prices were in the high thousands.

• The sole photograph on one ad was the same in-case shot used in the other. Visible hardware and wood matched the written description: four strings, an amber-to-red figured top, dark pickups, a gold bridge, dark knobs, and block inlays,

with a hard case.

- The serial was not readable in the listing photographs, including an enlargement of the back of the headstock (glare and a dark stamp only).
- The same seller, using the same boilerplate text, was also offering a different-colored bass of the same family. That second instrument was ruled out, but it showed a long-running local seller rather than a one-week listing.
- A web-index copy showed that a unique title-and-price combination for this bass had been advertised for several months. The older address was no longer live. That does not prove the instrument is, or is not, the stolen one — the theft date was not in the materials used — but it does mean the ad was not brand-new in the week of the search.

If the owner recognized the top grain from the saved photographs, the packaged addresses and screenshots were to go to the investigating agency. The seller was not to be contacted as a private buyer.

A weaker descriptive candidate on a local sale app

No serial-confirmed item was found on the local sale app. One listing was a meaningful possible descriptive match to the same no-serial amber four-string, but it was a related imported model with a different visible serial, at an asking price in the mid thousands (the headline price on the search card did not match the price in the body, a reminder to read the full ad). It was not the five-string named bass and not the compact imported bass on the owner list. Without owner photographs, wood-grain identity could not be established. All verdicts concerned matching the supplied descriptions, not allegations against sellers.

Ruled out and not found, second pass

- No live classified ad was found for the black Club-style bass with three gold-covered pickups and the short serial on the owner list. Look-alikes in the same region were a different color or pickup count, a different brand with a similar body outline, or ordinary violin-body basses.
- No ad was found for the five-string USA bass, its serial, or the custom name inlay, or for the compact imported bass on the list. Other live instruments from the same general family were different models.
- Look-alike striped or light-finished solid-body guitars were opened and ruled out on factory, color, year, or a readable serial that did not match.
- Every exact serial string was searched across the regional metros: zero hits. Short serials that are also common product names produced only unrelated equipment, as expected.
- A short description-only list of instruments without serials was kept for watch terms only. Common models on that list would not be a match unless photographs or a serial could be tied to the owner’s instrument.

Registries and what a public search cannot do

The priority serials did not appear in the public registry sources that could be fully or substantially searched. That is not the same as “already registered” or “never stolen.” Registration, if desired, still has to be done by the owner or by law enforcement.

A commercial pawn and secondhand-goods database used by many police departments was not searchable without a law-enforcement login. Asking the investigating agency to run the serials there, and in any state secondhand-dealer file, remains the highest-yield step that a public web search cannot replace.

Sources that were blocked or incomplete

These are limits on the search, not evidence that listings do not exist:

- Major used-instrument and auction marketplaces, including sold or completed listings and a stolen-gear channel, often blocked direct retrieval. Site-limited web indexes did not surface the serials, but inventory was not exhaustively browsed inside those sites.

- A large social marketplace was not meaningfully searchable without a logged-in session.
- Some registry search forms failed or were only partly retrievable. A general web-search service presented a captcha wall.
- Reverse image search was not run on the first pass, because owner photo files were not in hand and there were not yet verified candidate photos to compare.

How matches were packaged for law enforcement

The standing rule was: do not contact the seller. Save the listing addresses, the screenshots and photograph files, a note on seller location and any shared boilerplate across ads, and the written verdict (possible, unlikely, or ruled out, with the reason). Deliver that package to the investigating agency under the existing report, and leave contact with sellers to that agency.

Suggested monitoring that was recorded but not carried out in these passes included saved searches on the major marketplaces (including sold listings), classifieds alerts in the home region, and alerts on local sale apps from a session the owner or counsel already uses. Manufacturer serial inquiries, if made, should cite the police report number and should not be made as a public social post. Registry submissions likewise belong to the owner or to law enforcement, with serials, the report number, and owner photographs.

Owner photographs of each instrument — especially any custom inlay, distinctive wood tops, unusual pickup layouts, and neck or headstock serial close-ups — remain the missing piece for a firm visual identification.

Illustrative sample, details changed. Imagery and listing photographs from the original work are not included. This is not a statement that any particular seller possessed stolen property.