
THE STING BOOK

A Guide to Setting Up and
Running a Clandestine
Storefront Sting Operation

STEVEN K. FRAZIER

THE STING BOOK

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Frazier has been in law enforcement for over seventeen years and holds a graduate degree in Public Administration. Currently a Sergeant, he has served in nearly every position and job description possible within a municipal police department including investigative and undercover assignments.

The author is widely known for the development of successful sting programs that have recovered millions of dollars in stolen property and sent many criminal suspects to prison. He has designed and developed several stings from the concept stage, without funding and resources, to the level of being successful large-scale programs with strong funding, widespread support and stunning results.

The author's stings have received national and regional coverage in the news media and have been excerpted and featured on several popular television news programs.

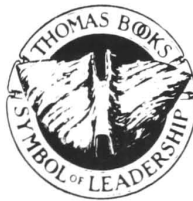
In addition, the author has taught sting technology to other police departments in state-funded training programs. He has traveled to various police departments throughout California to provide comprehensive training seminars. He has acted as an advisor to many other stings and has received requests for assistance from as far away as Australia.

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By

SGT. STEVEN K. FRAZIER



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For Rhae, Julia, Christine and Danielle

PREFACE

I don't remember where the desire to do a sting originated from. Maybe it was something that I read or saw on television. At any rate, I was intrigued with designing and running a program that would pull the wool over the eyes of scores of crooks and catch them on videotape doing their crimes. Imagine, I thought, how ironclad those cases would be. It would strip away all the defenses that could be perpetrated with lies and schemes. There would be no more court battles over the integrity of the officers. For a change, the crook would be put on trial, not the officers. They would hang themselves and nobody would be able to save them. They would get what they deserved.

I remember the uncertainty thereafter. How do I get one going? How much will it cost? How do I get my agency interested in it so that they will cut loose some personnel? How do I get a storefront? How do I set one up? A million such questions flooded my mind and I spent considerable time steeped in thought agonizing over such issues. I didn't know which way to turn. I was like a blind man dropped off in the middle of skid row in the dead of night. Dangers lurked everywhere and I didn't know which way to proceed.

Slowly, over time, I made progress. I learned a little here and a little there. I learned to go out and get what I needed even if it meant going outside my agency. I began to develop skills that I never had before and learning angles that streamlined my efforts. Pretty soon I began to gain some confidence. It began to snowball. One success lead to another. Soon there was a string of successes and I was on my way.

This entire book, *all of it*, is based on personal experience. I have suffered a lot of hard knocks and acquired many gray hairs to get it to you in print. Not that writing a book is so trying. Not at all. On the other hand, riding out a large-scale sting program, without the benefit of a book such as this, is a difficult experience you don't soon forget. As one of my colleagues in the sting business once told me, "We have slipped on a lot of banana peels to get here," and so have I.

This book is designed to give you the absolute inside track on setting up and running a sting program. It does not contain a lot of theory. It is written for practitioners, not academicians. It is for the working man on

the streets, in the foxhole, fighting the battles and for the administrators who supervise them.

It assumes that you have no money, no personnel, no resources and, most importantly, no backing from your administration. Why? Because that is how most of these things start. You have only a dream—you want to do a sting.

In this book I will show you how to get all you need and more. I know how to do it because I have done it, more than once. In fact, in the stings I ran, I and my sting partners had better undercover cars and better equipment than anyone back at our respective agencies and it was state of the art. We had all the money we could use. We had mobile phones, apartments, storefronts, the latest surveillance equipment, a comfortable and functional office and storefront, brand new office furniture, great hours, a spirited team, an exciting job, the wind and sun at our backs and the crooks going to jail in droves while we had fun. In short, police work the way it was meant to be.

This book takes a realistic approach from the point of view of someone without experience in sting programs trying to set one up for the first time. As such, it is written primarily to the project manager. This is the person designated, perhaps by default, to be the one who has to gather the resources, put it all together and then run it. More often than not, this is also the person who came up with the idea for the sting in the first place. Consequently, I have included extensive material on how to maneuver around all the administrative and environmental potholes.

There is great value, however, in having all of those in the chain of command involved with the sting to read this material. I have included many anecdotes and pointers on how management can ensure a sting program's success. Upper management in a police organization typically has one or more misconceptions about how a sting program operates. Without this information you may find that they will unwittingly create roadblocks to the efficient operation of your sting. You can avoid a lot of headaches if you can form a basis for mutual cooperation and support with your administration. The material in this book will provide the hard facts both you and they need so that you can find each other working on the same team without butting heads.

Not everyone reading this book and looking for answers to their sting questions will need to start at ground zero and I realize this. I have to teach and write, though, to mixed audiences. I have found that an overwhelming majority of my students have a majority of the problems that I write about in this book. These are problems that I, and other sting managers, have encountered or that consistently come up as questions in my classes.

For me, my years in the sting business stand out as the pinnacle of all my

experiences in law enforcement. It is like a block of time taken away from all the rest for which I have a million good memories. There were problems, yes, but many more times when things worked unbelievably well. I look at those times with a great deal of satisfaction.

My expectation is that your experiences with your sting program will be as exciting and memorable as mine were.

S.K.F.

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This book was over two years in the making. It wouldn't have been possible without the support and help of my wife, Rhae. During my involvement in the stings she endured the odd hours, telephone calls in the middle of the night and my feeble attempts to make a fashion statement on the criminal scene. The latter probably didn't earn us any points with our neighbors and friends. She also helped in proof reading the material.

A special thanks goes to Tom Caracash for his technical assistance in developing the line drawings and for proof reading some of the material. Likewise I want to thank Denise Sanders and Mary Schiavi for their help in proof reading portions in their spare time.

Finally, I want to thank Mike Mullen for providing his photographic expertise in documenting the stings and providing some of the photographs for this book.

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
Chapter 1: ARE YOU UP TO THE TASK?	3
Reinventing the Wheel	4
Can You Get Out of Your Rut?	5
Are You Flexible?	6
Can You Get What You Need?	7
Can You Stay With It?	8
Chapter 2: WHY DO A STING?	9
The California Stings	9
Arrests	9
Crimes Prevented	10
Conviction Rates	11
Intelligence Information	12
Recovered Property	13
Press Coverage	16
Training	16
Joint Operations	17
Chapter 3: SELLING THE PROGRAM TO YOUR AGENCY	18
Ideas From Above	18
Ideas From Below	18
Momentum	19
Conceptualizing the Program	19
Available Resource Assessment	19
Feasibility Study	20
Need Assessment	21
Exaggerated Goals and Promises	23
Scouting for Resources	23
Building Momentum	24
Chapter 4: AVOIDING FAILURE	27

Stings That Have Failed	27
Administrative Support	28
Obtaining a Sponsor	30
Chain of Command	33
The Buying-in Process	33
Diversion of the Project Manager	34
The Sting is an Undercover Operation	34
The Sting is a Full-Time Job	35
Draining the Project	35
High-Quality Equipment	36
Loaning Equipment Out	36
Breaching Security	37
Bad Apples	37
Chapter 5: COMPONENTS AND STRUCTURE	39
The Storefront	39
Props	39
Paying Attention to Detail	41
Business Hours	41
The Residential Storefront	42
Telephone Games	43
Covering Absences	43
Live-in Officers	44
Setting Up the Fixed Site	44
The Control Room	44
Alternatives to the Control Room	47
Telephones	47
Enhancements	48
A Garage	48
Back Doors	49
Alleys	50
Location	50
Business Fronts	51
Mobile Stings	51
How a Mobile Sting Works	52
The Surveillance Van	53
Targeting Receivers	54

Reverse Stings	56
Storage	56
Warning!	59
Keeping Track of the Property	59
Storage of Vehicles	60
The Safe House	61
A Residential Safe House	62
The Commercial Safe House	62
Outfitting the Safe House	63
The Safe	64
Chapter 6: CHOOSING THE RIGHT PERSONNEL	67
The Positions	67
Scouts	68
Storefront Officers	69
Investigative Assistant	70
Tracing of Property	70
Loose Ends	71
A Filing System	72
What to Look For	72
The Project Manager	73
The Big Picture	73
Goals	74
Officer Safety	75
Audit Control	75
An Adherence to Department Policy	76
Choosing Personnel	76
Volunteers	77
Exit Contracts	78
Post an Announcement	80
Application and Resume	80
The Interview	82
Personal Characteristics	83
No Rotating Out	85
Written Expectations	86
Personnel Problems	88
Burnout	88

Substance Abuse	89
Romantic Relationships	90
Fear and Anxiety	90
Chapter 7: EQUIPMENT AND TECHNICAL MATTERS	92
K.I.S.S.	92
Multiple Camera Systems	94
Earphones	94
Video Technician	96
Video Cameras	97
What to Look For	97
Different Kinds of Cameras	98
Lighting	99
Tinted Windows	101
Placement of Cameras	101
Switches	105
Lenses	106
Microphones	110
Shielded Cable	111
Sound Problems	111
Placement and Concealment	113
Soundproofing	114
Audio Mixers	114
Video Recorders	115
Date-Time Generators	116
Body Wires	116
Night Vision Scopes	118
Mobile Phones and Pagers	119
Video Printer	119
Chapter 8: RESOURCE ACQUISITION	120
Do You Really Need Cash?	120
Reimbursements	121
Contact Techniques	123
What You Need	125
Where to Get It	127
Private Industry	127
Community Service Clubs	128

Joint Efforts	129
Obtaining Specific Items	130
Video and Electronic Equipment	131
Building Supplies and Tools	132
Automotive Needs	133
Furnishings	134
Storefronts and Office Space	134
Printing Needs	135
Props and Flush Property	135
Summary	136
Chapter 9: LEGAL ISSUES	137
Entrapment	137
Due-Process Delays	138
Burglary or Receiving?	139
Solicitation Crimes	140
A Case of Burglary?	141
Credit Card Theft and Fraud	141
Civil Liability	142
Participation in Crimes	143
Have a Plan	143
Chapter 10: PLANNING FOR DISASTER	145
Countersurveillance	145
Don't Get Set Up	146
No Police ID!	147
Police Encounters	147
Transfers	149
Loss of the Storefront	149
Major Crimes	150
Using Signals	151
Armament at the Storefront	152
Prevention Is the Best Deterrent	154
Chapter 11: COVER IDENTITY	155
Getting a Driver's License and Registration	155
Social Security Number	156
Credit Cards	157
A Criminal Record	157

What Is Your Cover Story?	158
Mannerisms	158
Cover Props	159
Clothing	159
If You Get Made	160
Chapter 12: IDENTIFYING SUSPECTS	162
Ask Their Name	162
Writing Checks	162
Tag Teams	164
License Numbers	165
Telephone Numbers	166
Drive Them Home	167
Photos	167
Scams	167
Chapter 13: SECURITY	170
Case Histories	170
Site Location	170
Informants	173
Protecting the Cars	174
Alarms	175
Diversions	176
Concealment-Fortification	176
Security of Your Records	177
Protect the Technology	177
Chapter 14: KICK STARTING THE PROGRAM	179
Training the Scouts	180
Networking	182
Techniques	185
Reverses Into the Storefront	185
Reverses Into Bars	186
Newspaper Ads	187
Going to Jail	189
Pawnshop Patrons	191
Fliers	191
Move Into an Apartment	191
Street Contacts	191

One-on-One Scouting or Two?	192
Rip-Offs	192
Pricing Items	195
Get a Story Together	197
Sending a Crook Packing	197
Loaning Money	198
Chapter 15: CASE PREPARATION	200
Report Writing	200
Sting Program Synopsis	202
Property Handling	202
Misuse of Property	203
Dealing With the District Attorney	204
Chapter 16: KEEPING THE BOOKS	207
The Importance of an Audit Trail	207
Cash Flow Records	208
Spot Audits	212
Copies of Records	212
Spending Guidelines	213
Various Logs	213
Labeling and Storage of Tapes	216
Chapter 17: CLOSE DOWN	217
Filings and Warrants	217
Choosing the Target Date	218
Mass Arrests	219
Arrest Teams	220
Arrest Packets	222
The Briefing	223
The Operation Plan	223
The Introduction	224
The Command Post	224
The Staging Area	225
Communications	225
Itinerary	226
Press Relations	227
Tactics	229
Special Units and Assistance	229

Emergency Medical Treatment	229
Booking and Arrest Procedures	230
Field Identification	231
Equipment	231
The Aftermath	232
Attorneys	233
Opposition Motions	234
Sample of an Opposition Motion	235
Sample of Notice To The Defense	237
Final Report	237
<i>Index</i>	241

THE STING BOOK

Chapter 1

ARE YOU UP TO THE TASK?

A lone figure turned the corner and suddenly appeared through the large plate glass window.

“I think we have one coming,” called out Harry.

Dave moved to the rear office and closed the door. Turning to an open cabinet along one wall he pushed the record button and turned his attention to the camera overlooking the front counter.

Within seconds the figure stepped into the business.

“Hey, where you been?” came the greeting from Harry.

Dave glanced toward the shotgun leaning nearby in the corner. Just in case, he thought to himself. His partner’s safety came first and the visitor had been packing a gun on prior occasions.

“I got arrested,” came the answer. “Andre thought you guys might be cops. I ain’t taking no chances.”

Harry wasn’t taking any chances either. Unknown to the visitor there was a shotgun on the shelf under the counter pointed directly at his midsection.

The arrest was a fluke. A routine traffic stop turned up the visitor and his friends with a stolen gun in the car. A gun that the visitor had previously shown to Dave and Harry.

The conversation came to an abrupt halt as someone on the outside grabbed the doorknob and began to enter. The visitor stepped back and reached inside his jacket. Harry reached down and placed his hand on the grip of the shotgun. The visitor was intent on shooting the intruder if he had to, and Harry was going to shoot the visitor if he tried.

A few tense seconds passed. In stepped Jim, Harry’s “employee” who was, in reality, an undercover cop.

“What’s happening?” he said to nobody in particular, oblivious to what had transpired.

The visitor relaxed and took his hand out of his jacket. Harry stepped back and Dave sighed with relief. It was over as quickly as it began.

“What do you have for us today?” asked Harry calmly, as if nothing had happened, as if his heart wasn’t racing.

The visitor reached deeply into a pocket and extracted several credit cards and placed them on the counter. The trap was sprung.

REINVENTING THE WHEEL

Sting programs have been a part of law enforcement for many years. Over a decade ago the California Highway Patrol launched Operation Red Wrench targeting auto thieves. From that early prototype, many more stings have followed. Some have become famous, and some notorious. The sting concept itself has often caught the fire and imagination of law enforcement officers reaching for an effective tool to penetrate an ever increasingly impenetrable underworld.



Figure 1. Recovered stolen vehicles and parts constitute a significant portion of any sting.

Sting programs have presented a bewildering array of seemingly insurmountable and confusing problems to police managers and agencies who have attempted them. Each new effort has essentially tried to reinvent the wheel. Mistakes were duplicated over and over again. No program was able to benefit significantly from others that had gone before. Some well-conceived programs have failed because these problems were not identified and dealt with properly. Never before has the knowledge and experience been so readily available for the new sting manager.

If you set out to build an automobile you would not start from scratch.

You would not duplicate years of research and development that went into designing the engines and metals used in today's automobiles. Rather, you would take available technology and, perhaps, some off-the-shelf items and build a car to your own specifications. What you would add would be your creative genius by developing an improved product or one geared toward a specific purpose. Simply stated, you would take what someone else has made and make it better.

In the same way, each new sting program advances sting methodology. As I lecture on the subject of stings and train various police departments I am constantly amazed at the innovations that continue to develop. Many of them are clever variations on old techniques. Some are brilliantly creative developments never before seen. These advances were accomplished because the efforts of sting participants were not diverted by more routine matters. They were free to experiment with improvements by building upon the proven techniques of past stings.

Sometimes egos get involved and prevent some from designing their sting around someone else's successful program. Doing so, however, allows one to become experienced in building and managing a sting while proceeding over proven ground. This helps to remove the uncertainty and frustration associated with developing a sting for the first time. As time will prove, almost all successful stings end up being very similar in the way they are run. It's just a matter of whether a new sting manager wants to waste a whole year finding this out or whether he would like to pursue more profitable avenues and dispense with all the start-up frustration.

The fun of a sting is in improvising in the field. This is where sting participants can really show what they are made of. Setting up a solid base, though, is important to be able to get to this creative stage. If the base is faulty, then problems may hold a program back so that it never gets off the ground.

CAN YOU GET OUT OF YOUR RUT?

Designing and running a sting is not a path recommended to the fainthearted, the lazy or one used to settling for the status quo. You will have to reach outside yourself and devise innovative solutions to problems that may defy traditional logic. It is time to take stock of your motivation for seeing a successful sting to conclusion.

Innovative people filling a variety of roles as they seek nontraditional solutions to problems are the normal fare in a sting program. Ask yourself, is this the way I am prepared to conduct business? Can I live with uncertainty? Can I take a deliberate course off the beaten path without running too far afield?

Sting programs require policemen, yes, with police eyes to see crime occurring, and trained police noses to sniff out good leads. However, too much police demeanor destroys a cover. Too many police trappings are counterproductive. A police mentality, professional jargon and a rigid demeanor all act against an undercover officer's efforts to pass himself off on the streets.

Sting programs, however, also require carpenters, salesmen, auto mechanics, video technicians, security specialists and other roles. Can you step out of your police role and build a cabinet? Throw up a false wall? Tune up an undercover car? Assemble a video component system? (Don't worry, I will show you how to assemble a video component system.) You will find yourself doing less traditional police work and a whole lot of non-police activities, and having the time of your life. In fact, you will probably find, like I did, that participating in a well-run sting is the most exciting assignment you will ever have in your entire career.

ARE YOU FLEXIBLE?

All of us thrive, to some extent, on routine. We need a cup of coffee in the morning. We put one shoe on before the other. We drive the same route to work. Stings, however, are anything but routine. They require people who are not overly attached to routines but able to change with the evolution of the program.

Stings tend to start out slow and gather momentum, like a snowball. Expertise develops differently in different individuals and some begin outdistancing their coworkers in successful transactions. Personnel shifts occur. Tragedies, setbacks and emergencies occur which can change the whole course of the sting. Duties change over time. Some duties become nonessential (to the consternation of some) while new ones develop unusual importance. All these things, and many more, contribute to a swirling mass of activity that ebbs and flows with a life all its own. Sometimes it takes all of your attention to stay abreast.

Can you guide all of this activity with an iron hand? Not likely. Picture a rodeo. The contestants have the reins but the bull goes where he wants to go. The contestants are not judged by how well they steer the animal, but by how long they can stay on and the skill they exhibit. The same is true of a sting program.

Undercover officers learn very quickly that criminals don't work eight to five. They don't honor jurisdictional lines and they are often unreliable. A big deal cooking for weeks will suddenly come to fruition with a phone call in the middle of the night. An extended investigation might take you out of

the state or it might suddenly involve armed criminals and high stakes. Without warning it is no longer a simple game of car fenders and boosted cigarettes but a deadly game of one-upmanship with countersurveillance and all.

CAN YOU GET WHAT YOU NEED?

This brings us to a significant point in the sting process. How self-reliant are you willing to become? Put another way, are you a bureaucratic junkie? Public agencies such as police departments foster a nursemaid attitude among its employees. They are lulled into complacency by a hand-to-mouth existence within the organization. The employees are the recipients and the organization, like some giant bureaucratic mother, is the supplier of all needs. When we need something to do our job we either learn to do without it or we wait until the lumbering giant gets around to supplying it. This is subject, of course, to budgetary constraints, the whims of management, competing interests, paperwork and the requisition process. Does this sound like your work environment? If so, don't feel alone. It is the unfortunate state of affairs almost everywhere I go.



Figure 2. Mobile telephones are a favorite of thieves and are highly traceable.

Often, what we get is too late and too inferior to do the job right and we settle for second best. Constantly having to make do with bubble-gum-and-baling-wire solutions to problems is frustrating. Having to operate in a state of continual deprivation forces some to accept a fatalistic mentality. But it doesn't have to be so and *you* can do something about it.

Self-reliance means the ability to do it yourself. It means seeking out the shortest distance between two points without stepping over any forbidden lines. Creative thinking and innovation are needed.

Your sting program can't afford to stop just because resources are tied up in bureaucratic red tape. You must create your own support base. If you follow the suggestions in this book you will have better undercover cars, better equipment, a better storefront than you could ever have obtained through traditional channels in your agency and, in most cases, with fewer hassles. As they say, where there's a will there's a way. How determined are you?

CAN YOU STAY WITH IT?

A bulldog mentality goes a long way in a sting program. This is because, like any pioneer, you must blaze a trail. You aren't following anyone else's footsteps and there are no well-worn paths. Unlike taking a traditional position within the agency there will not be a pre-existing bureau to offer its support. Nobody shows you to your desk, because you first have to acquire a desk and then find a place to put it. You can't just put it anywhere. There are no routine duties to assume because you must determine what your duties will be. Nobody shows you what to do or offers any training because this is probably the first time anyone in your agency ever tried anything like this. There is no filing system until you devise one. No team until you choose one. No equipment until you acquire it. There is only you.

A sting program is not a picnic in the park. It is more like a three-ring circus with clowns and animal acts. It would not be unusual for an undercover car to be stolen (ours was) on the same day the body wire breaks down and the telephones to your storefront are turned off because of a late bill.

Likewise, the big deal always goes down when you're ready to go home at the end of a long day. Your best undercover officer always gets injured or takes vacation when you need him the most. The chief and his captains will always drop by unexpectedly when the place is a mess or when someone is horsing around.

In short, Murphy's law and entropy work like gremlins on your project. Not only will everything go wrong that can, but things will tend to move from a state of order to a state of disorder in short order.

Have I dissuaded you yet? If not, then read on. I warn you, however, you do so at your own risk!

Chapter 2

WHY DO A STING?

A good reason for doing a sting is because of what stings have accomplished in the past and what they have done for the agencies sponsoring them. Not surprising, the benefits and results are now fairly predictable and standard if the sting is conducted in a certain manner. How effective your sting will be will depend on how well you control some of the variables involved. It will also depend on how well you build on the lessons learned from other stings.

THE CALIFORNIA STINGS

Between 1987 and 1989 the state of California funded twenty-two stings statewide. It was an unprecedented experiment that brought a wealth of innovative sting techniques to law enforcement. These stings were sponsored by local and county law enforcement agencies of all sizes, from the largest to some of the smallest. In addition, they were participated in by state and federal law enforcement agencies on a limited basis in cooperative and joint operations. Some were based in metropolitan areas and some in rural areas. Some were joint ventures involving multiple agencies. They were conducted under nearly every condition imaginable.

From these stings and a score of others I have studied across the nation a number of characteristics associated with sting programs have emerged. These characteristics are trademarks of sting programs and common whenever a successful sting is conducted.

ARRESTS

The potential for large numbers of arrests is a guaranteed benefit. A sting conducted by the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, for example, netted 248 suspects. While this number is unusually high, it points out what is possible from a well-conceived program.

In the twenty-two stings conducted in California, a total of 3,114 suspects were arrested. A major proportion of those arrested in the stings were career criminals. As their name implies, career criminals are those criminals who make a career out of crime. In California, these individuals have to meet

certain statutory requirements before they qualify as career criminals. Once they do, however, they receive enhanced prosecution in the state courts. Career criminals are responsible for an incredible amount of crime. They tend to gravitate toward a sting program because it provides an easy market for their stolen goods.

An in-depth study was done of one sting to gain an overview of the types of suspects who were being attracted to and caught up in a sting program. This came after some concern was voiced from certain quarters that innocent law-abiding citizens might be entrapped in a sting. A detailed analysis of the criminal backgrounds of these suspects was done. It was found that criminal suspects with prior records of either armed robbery, auto theft, narcotics or burglary were most likely to be attracted to a sting. Not surprising, 81 percent of all suspects studied had prior records. In fact, it was estimated that 85 to 90 percent of all suspects caught in the California stings, overall, had prior criminal records. Most of those without prior records showed an involvement and sophistication in their criminal behavior that suggested that they were more criminally active than their records indicated but simply had not been caught yet.

Suspects with burglary backgrounds formed the largest group, constituting 32 percent of the total. Narcotics ran a close second, with auto theft and robbery third and fourth.

It was not surprising that 39 percent of the total had previously been convicted of a crime and 37 percent had been either to prison or jail. This is why such stringent security measures are taken at a storefront site. These figures, however, are considered underrepresented due to frequent omissions in the official records used to compile these statistics.

What this all means, in part, is that honest folks won't be pulled into a sting. They are, however, very attractive to the criminal underworld.

CRIMES PREVENTED

A less tangible and more difficult to measure benefit are the crimes that will be prevented as a result of the arrests arising out of a sting. It should be noted, though, that the mass arrests at the end of a sting combined with the dumping of several hundred crime reports into the system at one time will give the appearance that crime has suddenly increased for that period. However, stings do reduce crime and they do it in more than one way.

First, by removing a large number of the most active criminals around, a sting removes from circulation those who are committing a disproportionate amount of crime. From the case study mentioned previously, 115 suspects were profiled to arrive at an estimate of the number of crimes this group would commit in the period of a year. This number was arrived at through