

# The P.I. files

In the final instalment of our five-part series featuring real-life private eye cases, **Arlina Arshad** finds out how a boss discovered that a former employee had stolen the company's trade secrets.

THE boss of a big firm specialising in servicing factory equipment and machinery couldn't figure out why he was losing his clients, all within days of each other.

Finally, some of them told him that one of his former employees was offering to service their machines more cheaply.

He suspected that Mark (not his real name), a staff manager who had worked in the company for five years, might be behind it. The man had resigned two months after three technicians quit.

So the boss called in private investigator Vincent Tan and his co-partner, Mr Philip Tan of Commercial Investigations, to check on Mark, whom he described as "hardworking and having never caused trouble".

He gave the PIs a list of clients' names and also technical drawings, which are manuals drawn up by the company's engineers to show how machine parts should be repaired.

Technicians refer to these drawings while servicing and repairing equipment.

The PIs were asked to prove

that Mark and the former technicians had taken these drawings with them when they quit.

Mr Vincent Tan assigned four PIs to the job and over seven days, they learnt that Mark had registered a machinery servicing company the same day he quit. He recruited other staff, including the three technicians who had left the company earlier.

They had an office in Ubi Avenue. The three technicians, each armed with technical drawings, would leave for the clients' factory sites to work on the machine parts.

The PIs followed one technician a day. Two of the investigators acted as "lookouts", standing outside the factory buildings to make sure they were not being monitored.

Two others pretended to be prospective clients. One would keep the general manager busy in the office, and the other would snap a photo of Mark's technician and his technical drawing, using a tiny hidden camera embedded in a pair of sunglasses.

Said Mr Vincent Tan: "The PI would excuse himself, saying he needed to go to the toilet or to get

▶ Most bosses forgive former employees for trade secrets theft

MR VINCENT Tan (right), 43, and Mr Philip Tan, 40, started Commercial Investigations 15 years ago.

without consent. The firm is also hired by companies to check if their staff are moonlighting for similar firms, or if they



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