The existence of the modern corporate investigations industry is often attributed to the incorporation of Kroll Associates in 1972. This claim however ignores the fact that investigative work for profit often involves a plethora of skills and techniques which long pre-date the 1970s and have often been international in nature. These skills fall into two broad categories covert intelligence gathering (or espionage) and overt deductive work (investigative inquiry).

Prior to the establishment of Kroll Associates, investigative work was considered to be a low rent business and a frowned upon practice in the business community. However, the process of globalization with its increasing economic convergence, political fluctuation and national insecurity contributed to an increase in interest in risk management and corporate governance. It would be this context combined with a deliberate strategy for legitimization by Jules Kroll, the founder of Kroll Associates, that would lead to the destigmatization of investigation work in the United States and subsequently internationally. Jules Kroll wanted to replace the image of a shady private eye selling intrusive surveillance with a knowledge worker selling honesty who could be the professional peer of lawyers and accountants.

This presentation traces this history and considers the implications of investigative work as a legitimate business service upon which multinational corporations, national governments and high net worth individuals have come to rely.