



Should Employers Use Search Engines to Screen Candidates?

*You take the good, you take the bad, you take them both
and there you have the Internet*

We all do it. My preference is Google. I Google everything, my name, our business, our clients. Whether using Google, Yahoo, MSN or another search engine the fact is people search the internet to gather information on anything and everything.

Hiring managers are using search engines and social networking sites to recruit and assess potential employees. Some of the items an employer may research via the internet is whether a candidate would be a good personality fit for the culture of the company, whether they conduct themselves in a professional manner on-line, and if they have a wide range of interests.

Social Networking sites are no longer just for friends and family. The line has been blurred and the sites have become a blend of professional and personal. Whether people are utilizing Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Plaxo, MySpace, etc. they are publically posting photos, blogs with personal information, hopefully not while using an unprofessional screen name.

A recent CareerBuilder survey revealed 26% of hiring managers say they have used Internet search engines to research potential employees. Of the managers who browsed social networking sites, 63 percent found information that resulted in the candidate being dismissed from the hiring process. An employee being terminated for something they posted in a blog even has its own term, getting dooced.

Hiring Managers take great caution when conducting interviews face-to-face to protect themselves and their company by avoiding questions generally related to nationality, religion, age, marital or family status, gender, and health and medical situations. And yet with the click of the mouse, all of that information (digital dirt) is available immediately. Most likely, more information than they care to have accessed.

Should employers use the internet to gather information about potential employees? There are arguments to both sides. There are currently no Federal laws prohibiting employers from gathering internet information on candidates. A couple of states have established certain laws to protect the employee. California requires employers to disclose to an applicant any adverse information they find in public records in connection with an employment application.

It is clear there are undefined legal complexities. One of the major arguments to searching candidates via the internet is privacy. Yes, the candidate posted the information to a public site, but do they have a reasonable expectation of privacy from a possible employer? Another concern would be charges for employment discrimination and failure to hire lawsuits. An employer must have a legitimate reason for disqualifying a candidate.

An employer has to make the best hiring decision with information reasonably available to them. Conducting thorough, situational or behavioral interviews, focusing on whether or not the candidate has the skills and attitude to get the job done, will help minimize potential exposure and assist in identifying a successful candidate.

If your company decides to conduct internet searches on potential candidates, it is important to have written policies and limitations for these searches on candidates and employees. And make sure you keep abreast of any changes in the legal issues related to candidate/employee privacy and information privacy for employment matters. Just remember you are in a gray area of the law and are potentially opening your organization up to unnecessary exposure.

Side Note: *Go out and search your company. See what is being said about you. Is it positive? Is it negative? The way technology is we typically have no control about what others write about us. All we can do is be aware of what is being said. The way to counter negative feedback is to generate positive feedback. Check out your company and see who is saying what about you!*

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