

## **Career Builders**

By Mary-Alane Wiltse

### **Employment Screening**

With all the stories in the news these days regarding privacy rights and identity theft, not much attention has been paid to employment screening. In this brave new electronic world, more employers every day are running checks on their potential and current workers.

Employers choose to do screening for potential hires or promotions for a number of reasons. Some jobs legally require screening. They include jobs (and volunteer activities) that involve work with children, the disabled, or the elderly, as well as, many government positions. Jobs in the transportation industry, such as truck drivers, are also more likely to require background checks. Other employers decide to investigate potential employees because they fear getting sued. If an employee's actions hurt someone, and the employer did not run a background check, then the business is more likely to be held liable.

Other employers just do not trust their job applicants anymore. It is estimated that up to 40% of all job applications and resumes contain lies or exaggerations. Background checks are used to verify the information supplied by the job seeker, and with all the information available through the internet, it is fairly easy and cheap for employers to take this extra step.

Background reports can range from a simple confirmation of a Social Security number to an in-depth review of a job seeker's personal history and friends. Employers can review many sources of public records including driving records, vehicle registrations, credit reports, criminal records, educational credentials and state licensing records, military history, workers' compensation cases, bankruptcy records, and sex offender lists.

The federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) sets limits on what employers can take into consideration when making hiring decisions. Basically, information that is thought of as "negative", like a poor credit history, has to be ignored after seven years. This does not include criminal convictions, which they are allowed to consider forever, or bankruptcies, which have a ten year time-limit.

Job seekers and employees need to agree to a background check before one can be legally conducted. The notification of a background check has to be provided on a separate form and requires a signature.

The fact that an increasing number of employers are choosing to do background checks is just one more reason people should consider reviewing their own public records for accuracy.

The number one place to start is with a credit report. Free copies are available annually from each of the three credit bureaus - Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. These reports can be accessed by calling a toll-free number, (877) 322-8228 or by downloading information on the web at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com).

People who have an arrest record or have been involved in court cases should also check their records, by going to the county where the event took place and reviewing the court files. Court records are not always updated correctly. Something as

simple as a missing signature can keep a felony charge that was reduced to a misdemeanor from being changed on the books.

People may also want to check with the schools they attended to insure that the degrees issued, the courses taken, and the grades earned are recorded accurately. The same is true with checking their Department of Motor Vehicle records, especially if they are applying for a job that involves driving.

Checking personnel files from old jobs or asking former employers about their policies regarding the release of personnel records can be another valuable step. Many companies limit the amount of information they release to third parties, again for fear of being sued. Job seekers, who believe past employers will say positive things about them, should formally give permission to the company so that nice things can be said about their job performance.

For those individuals who are truly concerned about what an employer might discover they can always pay to have their own background check completed. By hiring an online company that specializes in these reports people are able to discover if the data bases of information vendors access contains outdated or incorrect information.

Finally, people looking for employment need to be careful about what they, themselves, put on the internet. More and more stories are surfacing about how people are not getting hired because of the material posted on their own websites or through internet sites like "MySpace" or "YouTube". Businesses don't tend to have a very good sense of humor about such things. Big Brother is watching.

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