



BACKGROUND SCREENING

The Power of the Background Check

In Today's Changing World, Timely, Relevant Data Makes All the Difference

"I don't go looking for trouble. Trouble usually finds me." While immortalized by Harry Potter, these are words to live by when it comes to hiring employees, choosing volunteer coaches or selecting new tenants, to name a few examples. While someone may appear to shine on paper or in an interview, do today's companies *really* know that the stated academic credentials of a job candidate are valid? Is there a history of violent outbursts due to anger management issues? Is a resume, let's say, *embellished*, or has a name or even Social Security number been changed to mask a criminal past?

How can anyone be sure that someone is really who they say they are? The answer is simple: they can't. But they can take reasonable actions to validate the information provided by a candidate. This is where background screening companies—and their ability to deliver timely, relevant information—enter the picture.

"The most important advice background screening companies can give their prospects and clients is that the best way to avoid a problem is not to hire that problem in the first place," says Barry Nixon, founder, National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence, Inc. "To identify potential trouble, they need to conduct thorough background screening checks that are based on the most accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date data available. The data also needs to be normalized to assure an apples-to-apples comparisons, and any dated or inaccurate information needs to be regularly removed"

Educate Your Clients

Most employers already understand that background screening companies search through databases, registries and other public and private sources to uncover potential warning signs, including validating criminal records, verifying education and checking references. This information provides important details about a candidate's history that can help predict future behavior. But do they know what information should be included, what information is legally allowed and how detailed background checks need to be?

"In today's mobile society, organizations can't take any information at face value," explains Barry. "For example, businesses open and close, which makes it impossible to validate work performance with a simple phone call to someone in human resources. But a background check can confirm other pieces of information, such as an address near the stated place of previous employment, to increase the probability that the information provided is valid."

At the same time, different positions require different levels of background checks. For example, a position requiring work with vulnerable populations like children or the elderly require more extensive screening than an entry-level administrative position. Is a client hiring for a position that will interact directly with customers or primarily work alone? What data will an individual have access to, and how sensitive is this information? Is the job particularly stressful? All background screening checks aren't created equal: it's up to background screening companies to deliver informed recommendations to their clients.

According to Richard Sims, chief operating officer and general counsel for the National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI), who gave a presentation titled "Background Checks and Employment: Why Background Checks Matter and the EEOC's Current Enforcement Practices" at a recent Chamber of Commerce event in Washington, D.C., comprehensive, reliable criminal history data is essential to effective risk management in the relentless pursuit of safety—particularly when it comes to protecting our nation's most vulnerable populations.

Abuse of children, the elderly and adults with disabilities in particular is widespread. While approximately 12 percent of all individuals have a criminal record, with an estimated one in 40 having a criminal record that is of relevance to an organization's screening policy, some of these individuals successfully pass basic background checks every day. As Richard points out, not all background checks are created equal and therefore background checks based on inadequate geographic coverage or incomplete data may fail to uncover offenses like rape, murder, assault with a deadly weapon and distribution of pornography.

Compliance. Compliance. Compliance.

Today's companies and organizations need to be educated about the importance of meeting compliance standards as well. By screening every applicant, your clients can demonstrate that they are treating everyone fairly without bias or discrimination. This limits the risk and liability associated with negligent hiring practices.

"Today's legal professionals are increasingly examining the timeliness and accuracy of the data used to make hiring decisions," says Barry. "Attorneys will stand up in court and ask background screening providers 'How often is the information you use updated?' and 'How many states did you check?' Background screening companies need to use data that can hold up under the toughest legal scrutiny."

Barry also notes that thorough background screening checks provide critical information that allow decision makers to piece together patterns of behavior. For example, a business might not deny an applicant a position due to a single restraining order. But if a thorough background check uncovers a history of restraining orders or arrests for disturbances like fighting, this information can be used in accordance with EEOC guidelines to make an informed hiring decision based on the specific position.

The Solution

Fortunately for background screening companies, timely, accurate and fully compliant screening data is increasingly available. You just have to choose wisely and ask the right questions when selecting a data provider. There is no longer a need to limit your offerings to a specific county or state, or to certain types of applicant information. Demand an expansive reach that stretches nationwide, information that is updated frequently, and comprehensive insight that offers "clues" about future behavior. Building the right data foundation for your business will not only add value to your clients, but will help you meet compliance needs and limit legal risk as well.

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