

Social Media Screening: Dos And Don'ts

Ensuring compliance while screening applicants is important

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In a little more than a decade, social media has become fundamental to the way billions engage with one another. With social media becoming such an important part of many people's lives, it is not surprising that it has also influenced the world of

recruitment, with HR professionals using social network background checks for hiring and screening needs.

These checks have actually been going on for quite some time, with employers often conducting

informal research of a job applicant's social profiles, with the intent of learning more about the candidate and ensuring there are no red flags.

In fact, according to a recent [Harris poll on behalf of CareerBuilder](#): half of employers check up on current employees on social media, with 57% of businesses finding social or online content that caused them not to hire candidates.

A Compliance Problem

While many hiring teams conduct social media screening in this way, there are a plethora of compliance issues that arise from this method. At the forefront of these problems, is running the risk of discrimination. In most cases, looking at a candidate's social media pages will provide a more in-depth glimpse of their personality and background.

However, even for hiring teams with good intentions, it is difficult to remain objective after being presented with so many intimate details, many of which will be entirely unrelated to a candidate's professional skills, expertise, or potential.

Even if they are not conscious of it, employers are more likely to hire people who are like them, meaning that social media screening in this way can reinforce existing biases. It also runs the risk of recruiting based upon ['protected characteristics'](#). These are categories that were laid out in the Equality Act 2010, and are illegal to discriminate against. If a candidate can prove that protected characteristics influenced a decision not to hire them, the business will face a legal dispute.

Why Use Social Media Screening?

Despite the risks of social media screening, HR teams across the country have been using social channels, both formally and informally, as an increasingly popular means of assessing potential candidates. In fact, Sterling's very own research report, ['Hiring Reimagined'](#), which provides a realistic outlook on the state of hiring, background screening, and candidate experience – as expressed by more than 1,200 HR professionals and over 3,700 recent job seekers globally – indicates that this trend is only set to continue, with more than half of respondents planning to add social media vetting to their current screening process.

And for good reason, as these checks provide vital information that helps employers minimize the risk of a bad hire and identify behaviors, such as bigotry, sexism, and violence, and recognize practices that do not align with a company's culture.

While some may think of employment screening as just another step to complete in the hiring process, the way that background searches are conducted can actually have a major impact on how candidates experience and perceive the overall hiring effectiveness of an organization that they are considering joining.

In fact, more than half (54%) of our candidate respondents agreed that their screening experience made them feel more confident about working with the organization or pursuing the job. Clearly, professionals place a significant value on feeling safe at work and knowing that a future employer has a robust screening process certainly appears to have a positive impact on the candidate experience.

Moving forwards, it is very likely that HR teams won't want to run the risks of managing social media screening themselves, instead trusting a third-party provider to perform a thorough, redacted, search on the publicly available web.

It is undeniable that these platforms can offer hiring teams a huge amount of insight

into applicants, but for many companies, the etiquette and ethics of using these channels are still ambiguous for them.

With considerable risks to be aware of and a number of professionals unwittingly breaking the rules, it is crucial that HR teams are up to date on acceptable usage of these channels. This type of screening is bound to continue to become a crucial part of hiring, and something that will be essential in engaging the best quality talent and reducing the risks associated with recruitment.

As a result, HR teams should not allow any complacency, ensuring that they have the proper measures in place to conduct compliant screening so that the benefits of social media vetting can be enjoyed – without the risk of harming a business's most important asset – its people.



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