

# Using Social Networks as an Employment Screening Tool?

Categories : [EMPLOYER HOT TOPICS](#)

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You're not alone. In fact, a [survey of more than 2,600 hiring managers](#) showed the number of employers using social media in their recruiting and hiring efforts has more than doubled in the past two years.

The reasons employers using social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.) for pre-employment screening are fairly obvious: obtaining information is fast, free and easy. But along with this unprecedented access comes substantial responsibility – and even liability.

So if you're using social networks to screen candidates, keep these common-sense guidelines in mind:

- **Develop clear rules.** Consult with your legal advisors to develop clear, written policies and non-discriminatory procedures regarding the use of available online information from blogs and social networking sites for screening purposes. Some factors to consider are: job categories and positions; the scope of social network searches; the types of information to be collected and documented; and the point during the hiring process when screening will occur. Once developed, apply these rules consistently to every applicant who walks through your doors.
- **Obtain written consent.** Before accessing any candidate's personal information online, have him or her sign a written consent form, so he or she is aware you may be looking at their online profiles, blogs and/or personal information. Once again, ask for your attorney's help in creating both policies and consent forms.
- **Appoint a non-decisionmaker to conduct online searches.** While specific rules will vary based on your individual hiring needs, hiring decisionmakers should never conduct social network screening. Instead, the screener: should be a non-decisionmaker; should report only relevant information; and should not record or report any information which an employer could not lawfully solicit on an employment application. If you're using a third party to conduct such screening, you are required to comply with both federal and state fair credit reporting obligations.
- **Save the social network search for last.** To minimize the potential for problems, only perform an online social network search after you've obtained consent, and then offered the position contingent upon the completion of a satisfactory background check.
- **Never discriminate based on what you discover online.** Remember that it is illegal to make a hiring decision based on an individual's race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or other protected characteristic – no matter how you obtain that information.

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