

The Basics of Pre-Employment Screening

Faced with numerous security, safety and legal issues, employers have become aware of the significant and painful consequences of a bad hiring decision. One way to reduce the risk of a bad hire is to pre-screen job applicants. Background checks help to create a safer work environment by ensuring that the people you hire “are who they say they are” and are more likely to offer the basic characteristics – the desired skills, a proven work ethic, and no record of violence – that you seek in an employee.

To minimize exposure for negligent hiring liability employers should be sure that they perform accurate and concerted background checks of all applicants as well as scrutinize any information, such as a resume, provided by the applicant. Gaps in employment on a resume need to be addressed to discover the reason behind the lapse. An effective way to avoid liability is to demonstrate “Due Diligence” in hiring, which involves making sure the applicant is fit for a particular job. For example, a delivery driver applicant’s driving record should be checked, and someone applying for a job working with children should be checked against the sex offender database in each of the states they have lived in.

Two additional benefits of pre-screening job applicants go hand-in-hand to make the application and job interview a more comfortable process. First, applicants who have a criminal record or falsified credentials are discouraged to apply to a company that has a pre-employment screening policy in place. At the same time, employers who have a screening program find that having a policy in place encourages applicants to be forthcoming about their history. When an employer is armed with all of the facts, a job interview can be a truly honest discussion of the candidate’s character and qualifications.

Some employers worry that job applicants will feel that a pre-employment background check or drug test is an invasion of privacy. The best background screening services are non-intrusive and respect applicants’ privacy rights. Strong applicants will appreciate the assurance of working with qualified workers in a safe environment.

Pre-employment screening from a reputable company is completely legal as long as the information is used correctly and the applicant has signed a consent form. Most pre-employment screening companies will advise employers on how to use information once they have it. Background checking companies should provide applicants with reports and secure the privacy of information with physical, electronic, and administrative safeguards. Employers performing background checks with the consent of their applicants place themselves at very little legal risk compared with the legal and financial risk associated with a bad hire.

A host of services are offered by screening companies. Pricing for individual services can range from \$5.00 for basic identity verification to \$50.00 and up for in-depth record searches. Services that are useful for all types of hiring include social security verification, county criminal records searches, national and statewide criminal database searches, and sex offender searches. By combining several of these services, a highly accurate report can be obtained. Also very useful are reference checks, education verifications, and employment verifications. These services provide evidence that applicants are telling the truth about their qualifications. Drug screening is another of the most widely used pre-employment services. Other services may be needed for a specific industry or job description. Examples of these services are driving records, international searches, consumer credit reports, state and federal district litigation records, corporate affiliations, judgments and liens, and employment physicals. Some companies can provide services with a turnaround of 1 – 3 business days, and some companies will quote longer turnaround. Be wary of the instant results offered by numerous online companies; the results are usually obtained by using an online database containing inaccurate and incomplete information. The most reliable criminal information is obtained by sending an actual person to the county courthouse for information instead of relying on vast online databases for clues.

Integrated Screening Partners is an affiliate of Promesa Enterprises and has been in the pre-employment screening business for over 10 years.