



Dos and Don'ts for Online Screening of Job Applicants

Screening potential job candidates' online accounts saves time, allows HR to conveniently weed out candidates that don't fit, and just seems like the thing to do nowadays with everyone online in some fashion or another. However, don't forget the downsides—legal ramifications can come back to bite you if you uncover information that is considered to be in a protected class.

For any hiring manager considering using online candidate screening, proceed with caution. To help you better understand what information you should look for and the types of data you can't use in your decision-making process, this list provides a few dos and don'ts. It is not an exhaustive list, however, and anyone in HR or involved in the hiring process should discuss potential legal challenges with someone familiar with HR, state and industry laws.



Don'ts for Online Screening of Job Applicants

- ❑ Don't proceed without investigating your state and/or industry's laws pertaining to online screenings and background checks.
- ❑ Don't dig around online without first getting written consent from candidates to perform a background check.
- ❑ Don't begin any online screening without first familiarizing yourself with the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA).
- ❑ Don't look at any information under a protected status, including applicants' age, race, family planning, religion, etc.
- ❑ Don't zone in on any isolated incidents (photos or language that may seem less than professional). Consider the person's overall personality and behavior and how the candidate might meld with the culture of your workplace.
- ❑ Don't use questionable or illegal tactics to circumvent the online profiles of candidates who keep their accounts locked down (e.g. don't create profiles and try to become friends or try to find someone who knows the person to snoop for you).
- ❑ Don't be judgmental and use information that you may not like against a candidate who is otherwise a good fit for the job.
- ❑ Don't judge a candidate negatively if little or no information is found about them online.

Dos for Online Screening of Job Applicants

- If managers or others are included in the hiring process, do make sure these employees are educated on FCRA requirements and any other legal issues that pertain to your industry or state.
- Do consider using a separate employee, not directly related to the hiring process, to do online screening. Come up with a list of items to check based on FCRA and other laws and ensure that the plan is used consistently. Then, have the information collected passed along to those involved in the hiring process.
- Do create a plan of how the screening will be done. Create a checklist that includes:
 - Who will do the screening?
 - Which websites will be used?
 - What information will be analyzed?
 - When (during the application process) will the screening be performed?
- Do keep detailed records of information collected and that may be used in the decision-making process—just in case—and spell out how the information collected will be used.
- Do ensure that the process used in online screening is consistently used across all candidates.
- Do understand that not everything online is completely accurate. Accounts can be hacked, identities stolen, and pranks can be played on even the most diligent protectors of their online information. If something seems off or questionable, ask the candidate to clarify.