How to Use Social Media to Make Hiring Decisions

In 2018 CareerBuilder conducted a survey and found that 70% of employers use social media to gather some useful information before hiring. And 51% of those employers chose **not** to hire someone based on information found on social media.[1] So employers are looking through Facebook, Twitter and other sites to see beyond the resume. A candidate's background listed online should match the qualifications he or she has stated on a resume or shared during the interview. That's what employers look for, and any discrepancy in this information can lead to potential employers questioning the accuracy of a candidate's resume.

It is also useful to gather information to safeguard their business from any negative impact caused by the recruitment of the individual. Vetting is a key part of due diligence carried out by HR to ensure the candidate will not bring the company into disrepute, or cause difficulties with any colleagues, customers or suppliers.[2] However, here are several don'ts of using social media.

One of the greatest risks is opening your company up to serious, and costly, lawsuits. Discrimination is the greatest source of lawsuits in hiring, or rather, not hiring. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is seeing an increase in the number of cases involving social media.[3]

First and foremost, protect yourself against liability of a protected class. Different than other aspects of our legal system, the courts are demanding that employers prove they did not use social media in their decision not to hire a candidate, as opposed to asking the accuser to prove that they did. Without following the proper process, it is virtually impossible to prove. If a company wasn't going to use the information, why did they look up the candidate in the first place?

Listed below are some steps to using social media as a benefit.

Have a written Company Policy. Included in this should be how and when to use social media and what information to use from social media. All employees should be trained on the use of social media and the company's policy.

Interview in-person before searching through personal social media. This will limit legal scrutiny. Obtaining **written consent** from a candidate to view their online profiles is another way to reduce liability.

Limit the search to necessary information. Use sites such as LinkedIn which focuses on professional history. If using other sites, keep in mind that people don't always have control over what is posted about them. And you can't unsee what you've already seen.

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[1] Anna Wood. Social Media Hiring Process (Blog, 2018)
[2] https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/323189
[3] Journal Social Media for Organizations, Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2019)

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Have a third-party do the searching, or have someone in HR who will not be conducting the interview search. Give them guidelines or even a standardized form to use on what is acceptable to look for and retain. And what not to make known to others.

Document everything! If you look it up, print it out, (often posts are deleted so print it now) and make notes about your decisions. Save emails, and notes for every candidate interviewed. Save this documentation in a secure place.

Be consistent. Search all candidates, or search no candidates. If this is not consistent, it can lead to discrimination claims. Also keep in mind that not everyone has a profile on social media, and by not seeing something from a particular candidate, we are not being consistent in our hiring practices. 16% of job seekers do not have a Facebook profile, says TheUndercoverRecuiter.

We all have unconscious biases - and these may influence our decisions on hiring a candidate. By following these steps, we can limit our exposure to unnecessary posts, and also protect our liability.