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8 Social Media Screening Myths, BUSTED!

Let's face it: social media isn't going anywhere.

Around the globe, there are over 2.77 billion social media users, and North America enjoys a "social media penetration rate of 66 percent," according to Statista. So it's no wonder that more and more organizations are considering social media checks as part of their recruitment and retention process.

The problem is that many myths abound regarding social media checks, including what, exactly, constitutes a compliant screening. So we decided to round up some of the biggest myths and bust them for good.

MYTH #1
It's illegal to conduct social media screenings on job applicants or employees.

REALITY CHECK
A *compliant* social media screen *is* legal. But the key word is "compliant."

By compliant, we mean a social screening that...

- **Provides relevant authorizations/disclosures and gets explicit permission from the candidate/employee** to conduct the social media screening.

- **Focuses only on business-related information and redacts protected class information when presenting results.** As you likely know, it's against the law to discriminate job applicants or employees based on protected class information, such as religion, race, and sexual orientation (to name just a few). Instead, you need to focus on business-related "actionable" information. For example, how many glasses of wine a job applicant had the other night isn't business-related info. The bigoted way the applicant talks about customers at a former job *is*.

- **Does not use any sort of hacking, scraping, or otherwise illegal or unethical ways** to gain access to social accounts.

- **Makes a good-faith effort, as dictated by law, to ensure the correct person is being reviewed** (in other words, making sure you're seeing information on the "right" John Smith, for example).

If hiring managers conduct social screenings on their own, they will encounter protected class information in addition to business-related "actionable" content. But a quality social media vendor will make sure you see only business-related info; protected class info will be redacted.

So, for example, in a compliant social media check, you'll see a job applicant's racist posts, but not any posts discussing, say, the applicant's religion. Thus, you're only seeing actionable information, and you can then legally say, "No. I do not want this person in my organization." (The adverse action process still applies, however. More on this further down.)

MYTH #2

Social media screenings aren't necessary. Basic background checks and criminal record checks are more than sufficient.

REALITY CHECK

Basic background screenings and criminal record checks provide insight into who a person *was*—e.g., education, previous employers, and infractions from the past.

While a social media screening does look into a person's past social activity, it also provides a solid snapshot of who that person is today, and often in a more authentic, unvarnished way than what you see presented on a resume or even during an in-person interview.

You'll get a better sense of whether the person might fit into the corporate culture. You'll learn if there is any troubling behavior—maybe not "illegal" according to the law, but problematic, like bigoted points of view or aggressive language online.

So don't think of a social media screening as a luxury or an add-on. See it for what it is: a worthwhile extension of the traditional background check—one that provides a more complete picture of the job candidate.

Related Links

- [What a compliant social media screen looks for](#)

- [10 reasons why it's time to switch to a new background check vendor](#)

Hiring managers are perfectly capable of conducting social media screenings on their own.

REALITY CHECK

Sure, a hiring manager could certainly put a job applicant's name into Google or find the person's Twitter feed. But just because they can, that doesn't mean they should.

As we've noted in Myth #1, there are legal implications if you do it on your own—ones that could result in costly litigation. If hiring managers decide to handle the social screening in-house, what happens when they come across protected class information? They can't "un-see" this info.

Not only that, but it's simply not feasible for one person, or even a small team of people, to conduct a thorough review. The online world is a vast place. A combination of powerful artificial intelligence (AI) coupled with human oversight is the winning formula when it comes to conducting an effective and compliant social media check.

And outsourcing this task could make the hiring process move faster. According to SHRM, 71% of recruiters have said social checks are effective in decreasing time-to-hire for non-management, salaried positions.

MYTH #4

When someone posts something truly awful on social media, the post usually goes viral and the person has to face consequences. There's no reason to buy social screenings; let things happen naturally.

REALITY CHECK

Yes, in today's hyper-focused world, if you commit egregious behavior online, people will take notice. Whether it's an EMT posting racist views about patients or a celebrity spewing hateful tweets, the online crowd is vigilant and ready to spread the word about the bad behavior, which often results in the person's employer stepping in with a statement and/or firing the person in question. (Like ABC did with Roseanne Barr.)

But do you really want to wait until an employee does something so heinous that it hits the news—and now your company is forever linked to this person and their offensive behavior?

Instead, what if you became aware of the questionable conduct during the *pre*-employment check? Or your ongoing social monitoring of employees alerted you about an issue *before* it escalated and posed a threat to your workforce and your brand?

Armed with critical insights gleaned from a compliant social media check or ongoing monitoring, you and your organization could take proactive measures rather than reactive ones.

MYTH #5

Social media screening is invasive. Candidates will probably question what type of company we are, and existing employees will feel we're all "Big Brother."

REALITY CHECK

Don't forget, we're people, too. We value our privacy. But here's the thing: we all have control over our social media accounts' privacy settings. And we're responsible for the content we disseminate.

From our experience in the trenches, most people's social media accounts are at least somewhat publicly accessible. So the information is already out there. And employers have a right to know if their employees are publicly sharing content from four critical categories (these four categories are at the heart of compliant social screenings):

- Racist or intolerant

- Sexually explicit

- Potentially illegal

- Potentially violent

In fact, we'd argue that employers have a *responsibility* to know about such behavior. Why? Because these behaviors could adversely affect the workplace, either directly, indirectly, or both.

Top 5 Reasons Employers Pass on Applicants Due to Social Media Posts

Careerbuilder.com Survey

According to an April 2016 **survey by careerbuilder.com**, 49% of hiring managers who screen candidates via social networks said they've found information that caused them not to hire a candidate.

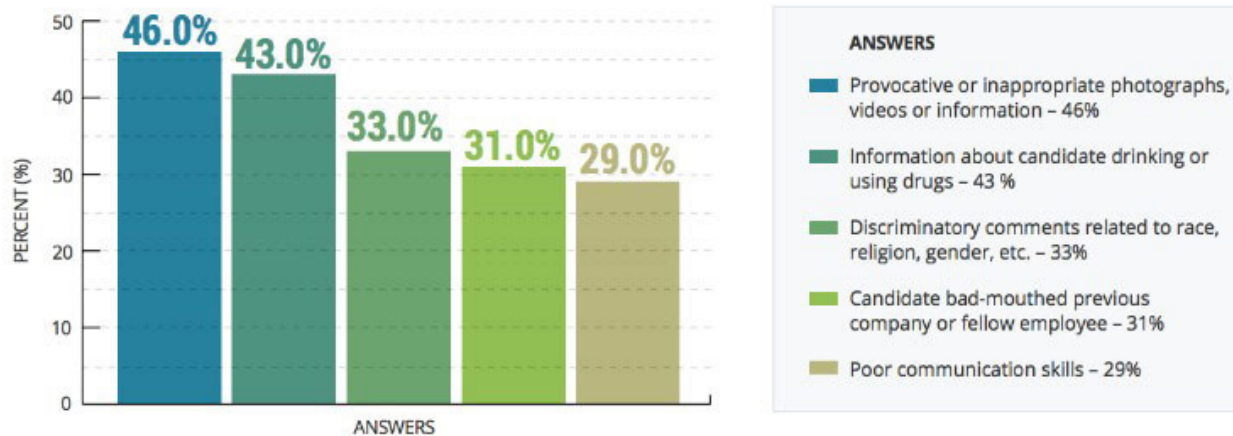**TOP FIVE TYPES OF CONTENT THAT ARE A TURN-OFF TO EMPLOYERS**

46.0% **43.0%** **33.0%** **31.0%** **29.0%**

PERCENT (%) — ANSWERS

ANSWERS

- Provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information – 46%
- Information about candidate drinking or using drugs – 43 %
- Discriminatory comments related to race, religion, gender, etc. – 33%
- Candidate bad-mouthed previous company or fellow employee – 31%
- Poor communication skills – 29%

Image by HubShout

For example, if an employee is regularly posting racist or bigoted memes on Facebook, how will this make coworkers feel in the workplace? Will it lower morale? Make people feel unsafe? And how will this intolerant language reflect upon your company?

Sure, the employee might put a disclaimer on their social media profile that says, "Opinions are my own." But we all know how difficult it can be to separate the bigot from the brand.

Remember, people aren't pre-programmed robots. They are dynamic. They change. They evolve. Life happens. They have successes. They have failures. And just because the *pre*-employment social check didn't turn up anything problematic, that doesn't mean a year down the road an employee won't begin posting troubling content. (The same is true with ongoing criminal screening, which is why we also recommend doing that as well.)

A screening that alerts you of problematic content and behaviors sooner rather than later can allow you and your team to address the situation appropriately before it disrupts employee morale, puts people in danger, negatively affects your brand, causes a PR nightmare, or all of the above.

MYTH #6

Pre-employment social screenings make sense. But ongoing screenings are a waste of time and money.

REALITY CHECK

The goal with *ongoing* social media monitoring isn't to "watch" employees and judge them on things, like what they're viewing on Netflix, how many glasses of wine they had on Friday night, or who they're supporting in an upcoming election. The goal is to monitor content in those four critical areas noted above.

And consider this: people might pass an original screen, but what happens after they become your employee? Isn't there more at stake since they're part of your workforce and representing your brand? Wouldn't you want to know if they're sharing inappropriate and/or illegal content on social media?

Not to mention that organizations from certain industries (think ones with stringent regulations, such as finance and healthcare) would be smart to monitor employees' online activity

34% of employers have fired or reprimanded an employee due to content found online.
Source: CareerBuilder

MYTH #7
Only the big platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, matter.

REALITY CHECK

Big platforms certainly do matter—it's where the bulk of people spend most of their time. But that doesn't mean content from those four critical areas can't be posted elsewhere.

Just consider some of the numbers from these other social sites:

Tumblr
500 million active
users per month

Snapchat
200 million active
users per month

Reddit
100 million active
users per month

MySpace
20 million active
users per month
(yes, it's still around)

And that's just the tip of the online iceberg . Online message boards are rife with inappropriate content. And don't forget the endless places where people can post reviews. (Just ask the Yale dean who was placed on leave once his "brutal Yelp reviews" were discovered where he called restaurant patrons "white trash."

MYTH #8

I don't need to worry about adverse action when it comes to social media screenings.

REALITY CHECK

Think again! If you plan to reject a job applicant due to information obtained on a social media check, you need to inform the job applicant via a pre-adverse action notice. This notice should include a copy of the check and a copy of "A Summary of Your Rights Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act."

The adverse action process is quite involved. A quality background screening vendor can help you navigate the process legally.

Related Links

- [A better understanding of adverse action in the workplace](#)

- [How adverse action can protect you from "false positives"](#)

- [3 steps to managing adverse action compliantly](#)

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If you're interested in working with a vendor that specializes in compliant social media screens, we invite you to learn more about Good Egg.

Our Approach

Good Egg's social media screening solution scours the web for a job applicant's behaviors that will put your company at risk. It identifies and flags the following: potentially illegal activity, sexually explicit material, potentially violent conduct, and demonstrations of racism/intolerance.

Features & Benefits

✓ **Complies with EEOC, FCRA, and state privacy laws:** this limits any liability to your organization.

✓ **Verifies candidate using more than one identifier:** we use multiple "identifiers," including name, DOB, email (just to name a few), so that nothing falls through the cracks.

✓ **Uses unparalleled artificial intelligence:** our AI is powerful, precise, and fueled by human oversight so you can have confidence in the findings.

✓ **Is available as a one-time check pre-hire, a continuous monitoring service on current employees' social media activity, and/or something you bundle** with our other background check solutions

✓ **Provides helpful insights without prying on people's personal lives:** we keep the concept of "Big Brother" in check so you (and your future and/or current employees) can rest easy.

✓ **Integrates easily into your current background screen**, so it's no extra work for you or your candidate.

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