

Nine Useful Tips

for Selecting a Background Screening Company

1. Be careful when comparing prices.

On the surface, proposals you receive from background screening providers may look quite similar. So much so that it may be difficult to see and understand the nuances that make one company stand out from another. Price, however, is something everyone can understand. We see a price and we can immediately compare one provider to another on this one tangible difference, right?

Unfortunately, wrong in many instances. In an effort to represent the lowest possible price many organizations have stripped out all but the base price for services, and attached to that a byzantine maze of schedules of additional fees. Often what is quoted and the total cost of screening are two very disparate things. Make sure you understand what fees, if any, apply and ask that your provider estimate what the actual cost impact of such fees will be.

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*** Another challenge in employment background screening lies in the old adage that cheaper is not always better. Less expensive usually means less comprehensive, and also that quality is sacrificed somewhere in the process.**

Quality background screening is not cheap, but it is very affordable. And when you consider the price too many employers have paid as a result of letting price alone rule the decision process, you'll quickly see why doing it right is better than trying to do it on the cheap. Remember this when comparing price from one company to another: Be sure to compare apples to apples and remember, the cost of screening is a fraction of the cost involved in terminating an employee, the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement, the cost of negative publicity or a lost client, and the cost to settle a negligent hiring lawsuit.

2. Don't fall for the "anything about anyone" promise.

Don't be seduced by companies that promise to find anything about anyone, with no questions asked. These are generally data miners who sell basic generic information, and more troubling, often sell inaccurate, out of date, or inappropriate misinformation. When employers choose to work with such companies they unfortunately put themselves, their organizations, their employees, their customers and the public at great risk.



Equally seductive is the promise that this will always get done in under 24 hours or some other arbitrary timeline. No reputable screening firm will make this guarantee, those that do are not being honest with you. The fact is that some of the over 3000 courts in the US control access to the public record and dictate how and when these records are disseminated to the public. Screening firms are NOT always in control of this process to the degree they might imply.

3. Demand a customized approach.

When selecting a background screening company, steer clear of those who offer a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Companies with this rigid approach will offer you a pre-designed program that fails to consider your unique risks, compliance issues, and business needs. While sometimes you can get away with a packaged approach, at times employers end up paying for information they don’t need; exposing themselves to an EEOC or applicant discrimination claim by obtaining too much or the wrong kind of information and then using it inconsistently.

A screening company should listen to your needs and tailor a screening program appropriately. If the company you choose to work with neglects to ask insightful questions about your company, the positions you’re hiring for, your organizational risk appetite, your business objectives, and other questions that affect the composition of your screening program, buyer beware.



4. Demand responsible use of criminal databases.

Criminal records searchers are often the cornerstone of many employment background checks. To save money, employers may be tempted to rely upon a national criminal record search as the end all be all source of criminal information. Because of their wide reach and scope, these sources are increasingly valuable as we seek to find the right jurisdictions to add to the scope of a local level criminal records search. While national records should be positioned as an important pointer to guide these criminal records searches at a local level, they should never be any employer’s sole source of criminal record information.

A responsible background screening company will refuse to allow an employer to cede to this temptation. Irresponsible screening companies that allow their clients to use national database records searches as the authoritative record put their clients in great danger since the quality of databases vary from source to source and simply cannot be relied upon without further verifying database information with a local court-level search.

5. Steer clear of offshoring practices.



A problem in the background screening industry that is currently being addressed through legislation and other measures is the off-shoring of sensitive Personally Identifiable Financial Information, (PII) like social security numbers and financial account information. This PII is sometimes sent offshore by certain background screening companies for processing of certain background checks.

We and other members of Concerned CRAs believe this practice places both applicants and employers at risk and should be avoided whenever possible. And if it must happen, applicants and employers should be made aware of this practice. The problem is, while we have protections in the U.S. for identity theft and other issues surrounding access to personal information, these protections provided by US law do not exist once personal data leaves U.S. shores. Clearly, no employer wants to be faced with the liabilities that can ensue when applicant data is mishandled offshore.

6. Look for relevant experience.

Does the screening company you're considering have knowledge of your organization, industry and relevant compliance issues? Your employment screening company can be a powerful source of advice, information, and experience – if you choose a knowledgeable partner.

7. Find out who the experts are, and if you'll have access to them.

A reputable background screening company will steer an employer through the screening process – not only the legal aspects of the process, but also the administrative aspects, from obtaining initial permission from an individual, to offering courses of action based on results, especially when adverse action or reinvestigation may be required. If you lack the expertise of an experienced screening professional, chances are you'll need some advice along the way. Find out if your screening company offers access to the people, higher up in the company, that truly know the world of employment screening. In other words, find out if you'll be stuck with an inexperienced call center employee or if you'll be given the direct phone number of top-level managers.



8. Understand the process.

 *A reputable background screening firm will want to understand your sourcing, recruiting and on-boarding processes.*

They will work with you to engineer a consistent, repeatable and predictable process that meets the needs of all the HR stakeholders and aligns with your strategy and culture. Your provider can be the best in the world but if the process is flawed you won't like the results.

9. Verify membership in the NAPBS.

Before you hire an employment screening provider, contact the National Association of Professional Screeners (NAPBS) to ensure the company you're considering is a member in good standing. While not a guarantee, membership in NAPBS gives you a good indication that the company is staying current with best practices and changing legislation.

Which Background Screening Company Will You Choose?

Certainly there is more to choosing a background screening provider than the tips we've listed above, but we hope this advice will get you closer to finding the right partner. At Proforma Screening we pride ourselves on offering a consultative approach to employment screening services that considers the unique goals and risks of your business. Speak with our human capital risk experts today and learn how our screening services can help you build a better workforce.

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