How to use a virtual footprint to perform a background check 101:

Overview

This set of instructions will guide you through the process of looking into an applicant’s virtual footprint. The purpose is to teach you how to search on the web to gather useful information that will provide you with enough insight to learn about an applicant. In the process, you will also learn how to analyze and interpret this data to decide whether or not the applicant should be considered for the job.

**User Qualification:**

These instructions were written for recruiters trying to perform a background check based on an applicant’s virtual footprint. The instructions assume that the user has experience with computers and knows how to navigate on the web, as well as social networking sites.

**Materials Required:**

* Computer with internet access
* Resume
* Application materials: notes from interviewer, recruiters, etc.
* Writing utensils or Word Processor

**Time expected:** 2-3 hours

**General Procedure:**

**WARNINGS:**

* Make sure you read and understand what they company’s policies on searching virtual footprints.
* Check for the reliability of information that you find during the process.
* Do not say/do something that will affect the company’s reputation while you are performing your research.

Instructions

1. Gather Data
2. *Get the required materials*
3. *Add the applicant on Facebook and/or other social networking site*

Once you have access to the applicant’s profile, make note of any “red” or “green” flags. Pay close attention to the pictures, events, groups, and posts made by the applicant. You could also take a look at the applicant’s friends’ posts.

**TIP:** It is a good idea to create an account for at least one of these social networking sites if you haven’t done so already.

1. *Search the applicant on a search engine.*

Type the applicant’s name on Google, or other search engine, and see what hits you get. Try to find information/pictures that show the values and personality of the applicant.

**NOTE:** If you do not get any hits, use the applicant’s resume to perform an advance search. For example, if the applicant’s resume talks about a competition, search the applicant’s name along with the competition’s name. This is a good way to confirm information provided by the applicant.

1. Interpret Data
2. *Organize your data*

Make a table of three columns:

* 1. Findings
  2. Conclusion
  3. Category

Use the information you found on part A to fill in the “Findings” column.

For example: if you find many pictures of the applicant volunteering, you should write “Participates in community service” as one of your findings.

1. *Make conclusions for each finding*

Draw a conclusion(s) for each finding based on the data you collected on part A and the findings you came up with on part B. Your conclusion should be general, but make sure it reflects the personality of the applicant.

For example: One of the findings from the previous example was “Participates in community service.” From this finding, it can be concluded that the applicant has initiative to help others and likes to work with people.

*Caution:*  Do not base all your conclusions solely on one piece of information, even if this is a red flag. This could ruin someone’s reputation erroneously.

1. *Separate the data/findings into categories*

Try to separate your conclusions into 3 to 4 groups based on their relevance. Your groups should create an image of the applicant.

**TIP:** The categories should sound as neutral as possible to avoid misunderstandings. For example: A more unbiased way of saying “the applicant is extraordinary with computers,” is “ the applicant appears to have good computer skills.”

1. Make a Recommendation
2. Make a final decision

Based on the final categories created in part B, decide whether or not applicant is suitable for the job. Once a decision has been reached, write a report in which you present your findings, and explain your interpretations and final decision.

1. List any additional suggestions

If there were some things that were unclear while doing your research, or if you did not find enough information, make a suggestion of what steps should be taken to get better information.

For example: If you find a picture with “questionable” behavior that is not necessarily considered a red flag, you could suggest to contact references or to make another interview.

Conclusion

At this time you should have a table with your findings, conclusion, and categories, as well as a report (memo format) ready to show to the recruiting manager. Read the memo before you turn it in and make sure that it clearly states your recommendation and the evidence that backs up your decision. Remember to include any discrepancies that you found during your research.