

Personnel Space

A Monthly Dose of Tactics to Attract, Train and Motivate Employees

Searching for Answers

IF YOU DON'T SEARCH FOR AN APPLICANT'S NAME online right after his or her résumé comes in the mail, you're way behind the times, says Lance Ulanoff, an editor at PC Magazine.

"I think that virtually anyone who is interviewing someone will 'Google' (the applicant's) name, before" he says. "By doing this, you see another side of their personality — whatever it is they're sharing with the rest of the world."

Sounds like a good idea, at first glance. After all, would you really want to hire someone who, according to Web sites you found on a search, badmouths his or her boss? It's not just as simple as plugging in a name and making discerning decisions, though, Ulanoff explains. So, to find out more about just what kind of information is available online about your potential hires — and whether or not it should affect your hiring decision, Floral Management editors asked Ulanoff, a technology guru, to share his expertise.

The Must-Dos

Certain things are no-brainers when it comes to learning about potential employees — or even current employees — online. The first, as mentioned above, is the general online search, conducted by typing the applicant's name into a major search engine such as Google, Yahoo or MSN. Other places to check include online networking sites, such as MySpace.com and FaceBook.com (See Plugged In on p. 56 for more on networking sites), especially if you're considering a recent grad for a position or for summer work. Members of these networks throw security concerns out the window and upload photos, personal information and often blog on these Web sites, making them a wealth of personal information.

And, don't worry about being too nosy. Today, investigating online is the equivalent of calling references, Ulanoff says. The Tampa Tribune recently reported that almost 75 percent of recruiters surveyed by ExecuNet, an executive recruiting company in Norwalk, Conn., said they use search engines as "part of the process to uncover information about job candidates." Even more telling is that more than 35 percent said they have eliminated candidates because of what they discovered about them online, according to the study.

The Red Flags

When you click on sites containing an applicant's name, you



Info To Go

Make it Legal

For a list of things you cannot legal use to make hiring or firing decisions, click on the Info to Go logo on SAF's member Web site, www.safnow.org. Or, get it via Fast Fax by calling (888) 723-2000 and requesting document #848.

The Interview: A Whole New Game

The ability to search for candidates online has changed the dynamics of the interview process, says Lance Ulanoff, an editor at PC Magazine. "It used to be that when (applicants) did face-to-face interviews, (they) controlled their image," he says. "They could pick and choose what they want you to know about them."

Now, the employer has the upper hand. "Really smart people know how to control their online identity — they keep posting good stuff about themselves to outweigh bad," he says, "but most don't even know what's out there." That's good news for business owners skeptical about applicants, he adds.

"People tend to think that online, there are no rules," says Ulanoff. "But, what they may not know is that all the real-world rules still apply," and that you can readily use the information you find online to make important business decisions — such as who to hire, and who not to. 🍀

— J. H.

aren't likely to find anything relevant or be overwhelmed with information, according to Ulanoff.

Ulanoff says to avoid people who willingly give personal information — full names, children's names, address — on a blog or social networking site. "They're obviously not thinking things through," he says. "If they use poor judgment on a blog, they'd do it with business, too."

Remember: certain information, legally, is off-limits when determining employment — race and gender being the biggest. (For a list of information employers can't use to hire or fire employees, see Info to Go).

Don't Go Overboard

There are some things you'll learn about job candidates that really aren't a big deal.

"If someone says, 'I'm a Democrat,' what different does it really make to most business owners?" Ulanoff asks.

Also, don't automatically discount someone for having a blog or personal URL, he says. If there's nothing questionable on it, they likely won't start putting questionable things online after they start working for you. Sometimes even the fact that someone has their own URL or MySpace page is a good sign, not a bad one, he argues. "If someone is up on technology trends — and they're doing this stuff and doing it well, it might be the kind of person you need in your business," he says. 🍀

— Julia Hoffman

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