

Where background checks matter most

Background screening is arguably one of the most essential steps in human resource management and staff recruitment today. They assist with improving transparency and disclosure, ensuring that informed decisions can be made regarding one of the most important assets of an organisation - its employees. Prospective employees may not always be 100% upfront when applying for a position with companies. Employing the use of a background check programme can therefore assist with red flagging criminal behaviour, unverified qualifications, fabricated experience and other relevant information, before the legally binding employment contract is signed.



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Rudi Kruger, general manager for LexisNexis Risk Management, delves into how background checks act as an investment in rooting out unsuitable candidates. “It is a well-worn phrase, ‘The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.’ While it is not necessarily always the case, the fact an employee/employer relationship is legally binding means that employees cannot be fired in the event of certain behaviour patterns showing up only after they are hired.”

For this reason, an employment contract should not be entered into until all the relevant checks are concluded and the results are available for clear and factual assessment.

Dealing with money and customers

In a corporate environment, employees dealing with finances or providing customers with financial advice should be checked in accordance with the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act. These checks include the FSB Fit and Proper check, credit check and criminal check.

“These pertinent checks go a long way in identifying behaviour like involvement in crime or past and present issues with credit and whether the candidate has been debarred from providing financial advice,” said Kruger. “Employees who need money or have a history of theft are more likely to steal from the employer or customer should the opportunity arise. This is not a situation any employer wants to face, especially when early detection was possible through criminal checks.”

Workplace safety

Pre-screening candidates also aids in ensuring a safer work environment for existing employees. “Work place violence is an unfortunate reality. The mental and physical health of workers must be taken into account when introducing a new member to the team,” said Kruger. “Through the use of a screening process before a candidate is employed, businesses are more likely to uncover prior complaints against individuals through either former employers or even, in extreme cases, criminal records,” he added. Extra vigilance is especially expected in cases where the potential employee will be in direct contact with civil society like hospital workers, police or teachers.

Reputation protection

Every business owner is aware of the effort that goes into building a reputation that positions the company as trustworthy and above-board. “Avoid introducing employees into your company who have the potential to tarnish your reputation, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Nobody can predict the future but an evaluation of a candidate’s history will quickly give you an idea of their integrity and credibility. This also holds true for NGOs that rely on the goodwill of volunteers.

“While it is difficult to turn away those offering a helping hand, the rules of the employer/employee relationship still hold significance in these circumstances. Much like companies, NGOs that engage volunteers, also have a reputation to uphold and any negligence or negative publicity can affect cash flow, and in some cases, lead to closure or worse, scar those in the care of these individuals. It is therefore imperative that volunteers are screened accordingly, before they enter an organisation,” Kruger said.

Fabricated qualifications and experience

Some of the most prominent forms of CV fraud are fabricated academic qualifications and experience. These gross misinterpretations may assist the candidate with appearing more qualified for the job. However, once hired – their failure to perform can quickly turn disastrous for the employer.

“We have seen numerous, high profile cases of incompetence in South Africa. Many of them were found to have lied on their CV about their qualifications yet, they managed to obtain senior positions.

“Recruiters should never accept the information on CVs as is. Nobody, as evident from some of the prominent examples, should be blindly trusted. Always verify the authenticity of the qualification as well as their experience,” said Kruger.