

Facebook: The Resume You Didn't Know You Had: An In Depth Look At Companies Use of Facebook To Research Potential Hires

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the growing trend of employers using Facebook and other social media pages of potential employees to evaluate their personality and determine if they are right for the job. It examines both past research conducted along with primary research conducted in the form of interview. Finally, the author gives personal experience and recommendations based on all the different sources covered in this paper.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Secondary Research Summary and Analysis
3. Primary Research Summary and Analysis
4. Personal Experience and Recommendations
5. Conclusion
6. References

Introduction

The average college student spends 106 minutes on Facebook each day (Blogspot). We share our photos, videos, likes, dislikes, thoughts, and opinions with the 1 billion members of the world's largest social media website. There are privacy settings we have the ability to control which dictate who can and cannot see our content, however we are still painting an online portrait of ourselves open to the semi-public eye. The Patriot Act allows state agencies to bypass privacy settings on Facebook in order to look up potential employees. (Debatin) It is only logical that employers have begun to use this available information in order to assist them in deciding whether or not a candidate will make an efficient employee.

Secondary Research Summary and Analysis

According to a nationwide survey conducted by Harris Interactive, approximately thirty seven percent of hiring managers use social media sites to research their job applicants. (Richard) Similar studies have shown an even greater percentage of employers doing this, some even as high as ninety one percent (Sunshine). Not surprisingly, Facebook is most often the primary resource used. Eleven percent of the surveyed managers said that they planned to begin using Facebook for said purpose so clearly the practice is catching on rapidly (Richard). Only fifteen percent of the surveyed companies had official policies that forbade

their managers from using social media sites as a resource for their hiring process (Richard) .

There seems to be some discrepancy between employers' reasons for utilizing this practice. Sixty five percent reported doing it "to see if the applicant 'presents him- or herself professionally (Richard).'" Fifty percent wanted to find out if the candidate would fit in well with the company's culture. Forty five percent said they simply wanted to learn more about the potential employee's qualifications. Twelve percent admitted to using the resources specifically to find some reason to not hire the person and of the entire 2,000-manager sample, thirty four percent had already experienced at least one incident where they found reason to not hire from the applicant's social media presence (Richard). Some of the reasons given for those decisions were the person speaking badly about a former employer, lying about qualifications, and being a poor writer. The main reason, however, was the person having provocative photos and/or making reference to drinking or drug use. That accounted for just over half of the cases (Richard). The silver lining for potential employees is that 18% of employers had at least once found content on a candidate's social media sites that influenced him/her to hire that candidate (Sunshine). The top reasons given for that were "a good feel for the candidate's personality," confirmation of their qualifications, and creativity (Sunshine).

For companies, using Facebook to gain information about people does not end with the hiring process anymore. Last year the National Labor Relations Board elected to give employers the right to fire employees for having inappropriate content on any of their social media sites (Sunshine)

There has been a lot of public opposition towards how employers are misusing and abusing people's Facebooks. A popular argument claims that a person's Facebook page is nothing more than a social and personal expression, which has zero influence on that person's ability to perform a job well. The problem with this assertion is that a study published by the Journal of Applied Social Psychology earlier this year proved that a person's Facebook profile can be an accurate predictor to what employee he/she may be (Hill).

In a series of two studies conducted by researchers at Northern Illinois University, the University of Evansville and Auburn University, six people with experience in human resources were asked to rate a sample of 500 people in terms of key personality traits using only the sample group's Facebook pages as a guideline (Hill).

The raters were told to spend roughly five to ten minutes with each person's Facebook page, and work on the project for no longer than one and a half hours per day to avoid fatigue. They were asked to rate members of the sample group on what is known as the "Big Five" personality traits, which includes extroversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness and openness to new experiences. Human resources managers generally accept high scores on these traits as an indication of future good job performance (Hill).

The researchers found that the raters were generally in agreement about the personality traits expressed in the sample group's Facebook page, and that their ratings correlated strongly with self-rated personality traits. More importantly, they also found that the Facebook ratings were a more accurate way of predicting a person's job performance than an IQ test (Kluemper).

Whether we like it or not, Facebook and other social media sites are “becoming the digital proxies for our real world selves (Hill).” Many employers are beginning to think that they can gauge more about a person’s personality, characteristics, and likely level of success with the company from their Facebook page than they can from a quick and rigorous interview.

From the employer’s point of view, why wouldn’t they want to use every legal resource they have available to research their applicants before making a very large investment on a person? The costs of hiring and training a new employee hold a much greater weight than the risk of not performing a full and thorough background check on that employee.

Primary Research Summary and Analysis

Mashi Blech is the director of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York’s Community Connections TimeBank. She runs the entire 1,500-member program and oversees the 23 employees in her department. She is responsible for the hiring and firing processes as well. I had the chance to interview Blech over the phone about her experiences with those processes with regards to social media’s influence upon them. Up until about 18 months ago Blech had never used nor felt the need to use social media background checks for hiring candidates. This was until she made the decision to hire a man whom she chose not to name. She explained to me that “he was a brilliant man, but his personality did not quite fit in with our department’s culture. Collaboration was a key aspect of his position and his need to always be right prevented him from working nearly as efficiently as I had hoped.”

After she chose to let him go, she decided to take a look at the man’s Facebook page. “I had heard of other people using Facebook to learn more about hiring candidates and I wanted to see for myself if the practice had any merit.” She had always considered Facebook to be a purely social site so never thought that using it for research was a valid method. However, her opinion changed when she looked at the profile page of the man she had just fired.

“I found several red flags that would have made me think twice about hiring him in the first place,” Blech stated. He had posted several misogynistic comments, badmouthed past employers, and his page was littered with profanity. Blech found that those facts matched his personality in the office remarkably well. She now performs Facebook searches for all her new applicants. She commented on how it is especially important to do for positions that require a great deal of human interaction and collaboration. “It’s better for me to figure out that we aren’t a good match before any contracts are signed. It saves us both time and money.”

She ended the interview saying, “you can only tell so much from a formal interview. Sometimes people aren’t being themselves, but rather the person they think you want them to be. It’s just helpful to have this extra resource available.” Since that incident 18 months ago, Blech has turned down two potential candidates based on things she saw on their Facebook pages.

Personal Experience and Recommendations

Last year I was searching for an internship with an advertising firm in New York City for the summer. During my search I managed to secure an interview with a marketing strategy and execution firm called CreativeFeed. The discussion went very well and I really felt as if I had clicked with my interviewer. However, she caught me very off guard with a statement she made at the end of the interview. She told me that she was very impressed with me as a candidate, but she was a little put off by some of the content published on my Facebook page. There were some photos of me consuming alcohol. I explained to her that I’m 21 years old and I drink alcohol casually, but it has zero effect on my work ethic and I know I would be a great asset to their company. After a few minutes of discussion on the subject I had calmed her worries. I ended up working there this past summer, but my Facebook page was very close to keeping me from getting the position.

Conclusion

It is very easy for our generation to get very angry over this perceived invasion of privacy. We feel as if our online social presence is completely uncorrelated with how we can perform in the workplace. However, the reality of the world is that more and more employers can and will look at our Facebooks at some point during the hiring process and we cannot change that. So my advice to all young adults is to adapt to the changing world and edit your Facebook pages. Keep incriminating photos (especially those with alcohol or drugs) off of the Internet. Try to not leave tons of substance-less comments everywhere. Employers tend to get turned off by those who seem to spend every waking second on social media sites. It is also smart to keep the comments you do post free from expletives and vulgar, insensitive comments. Do not post any negative comments about past employers or colleagues. If you don’t know somebody, don’t connect with him or her on social media. There’s always a chance that he or she is a person you do not want to be associated with (Sunshine). Your Facebook page is almost like your first interview. The chances are if an employer doesn’t like you there than they are not going to like working with you. We live in a world where we love to share every single thought we have with all of our friends. This is a dangerous habit and a slippery slope. We must remember that the Internet publishes content permanently and many things are better left off of it.

References

- Bennett, Shea. "91% of Employers Use Twitter, Facebook And LinkedIn To Screen Job Applicants." *Mediabistro*. N.p., 24 Oct. 2011. Web. 30 Nov. 2012. <http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/social-media-job-screening_b15090>.
- Debatin, Bernhard, Jennette P. Lovejoy, Ann-Kathrin Horn, and Brittany N. Hughes. "Facebook and Online Privacy: Attitudes, Behaviors, and Unintended Consequences." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 15.1 (2009): 83-108. Print.
- Hayden, William R., and Stephanie R. Leach. "Background Checks and the Pitfalls That Employers Face." *Employee Relations Law Journal* 38.1 (2012): 14. *Academic OneFile*. Summer 2012. Web. 1 Dec. 2012. <<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE|A290418337&v=2.1&u=laureate12&it=r&inPS=true&prodId=AONE&userGroupName=laureate12&p=AONE&digest=155690bc6bb31db1d5b606620d7e64ea&rssr=rss>>.
- Hill, Kashmir. "Facebook Can Tell You If A Person Is Worth Hiring." *Forbes*. N.p., 5 Mar. 2012. Web. 28 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2012/03/05/facebook-can-tell-you-if-a-person-is-worth-hiring/>>.
- Hill, Kashmir. "What Employers Are Thinking When They Look At Your Facebook Page." *Forbes*. N.p., 6 Mar. 2012. Web. 28 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2012/03/06/what-employers-are-thinking-when-they-look-at-your-facebook-page/>>.
- Kelley, Michael. "Your Facebook Profile Can Determine What Type Of Employee You'll Be." *Business Insider*. N.p., 5 Mar. 2012. Web. 28 Nov. 2012. <http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-03-05/news/31123156_1_facebook-profiles-social-networking-personality>.
- Kluemper, Donald H., Peter A. Rosen, and Kevin W. Mossholder. "Social Networking Websites, Personality Ratings, and the Organizational Context: More Than Meets the Eye?" *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 42.5 (2012): 1143-172. Print.
- Richard, Jocelyn. "37 Percent Of Employers Use Facebook To Pre-Screen Applicants, New Study Says." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 20 Apr. 2012. Web. 29 Nov. 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/20/employers-use-facebook-to-pre-screen-applicants_n_1441289.html>.
- Sunshine, James. "How Companies Use Facebook To Hire And Fire Employees." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 4 Aug. 2012. Web. 29 Nov. 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/04/new-infographic-shows-how-companies-target-unemployed_n_918816.html>.
- "Your GPA on Facebook." *Blogspot*. N.p., 7 Sept. 2012. Web. 1 Dec. 2012. <<http://politicalcalculations.blogspot.com/2012/09/your-gpa-on-facebook.html#.UL19VYVhJTR>>.

Essay Example from 5StarEssays