

Companies that screen social media accounts alienate job candidates

November 25 2013, by Matt Shipman

Research from North Carolina State University shows companies that screen the social media accounts of job applicants alienate potential employees – making it harder for them to attract top job candidates. In some cases, social media screening even increases the likelihood that job candidates may take legal action against the offending company.

"The recruiting and selection process is your first indication of how you'll be treated by a prospective employer," says Will Stoughton, a Ph.D. student at NC State and lead author of a paper describing the research. "If elite job prospects feel their privacy has been compromised, it puts the hiring company at a competitive disadvantage."

The researchers did two studies, which returned similar results.

In the first study, 175 [participants](#) who had applied for a job online were told that their Facebook accounts had been reviewed for "professionalism," and that a decision on whether they'd been hired was forthcoming.

Of the 175 participants, two-thirds reported finding the prospective employer less attractive because they felt the Facebook screening was an invasion of privacy that reflected poorly on the company.

In the second study, 208 participants were asked to envision a hypothetical scenario in which a prospective employer reviewed their Facebook profiles for professionalism. Half of the participants were

asked how they'd respond if they had gotten the hypothetical job, while the other half were asked how they'd respond if they hadn't gotten the job.

The job offer made little difference, with 60 percent of participants in both groups reporting a negative view of the potential employer due to a sense of having their privacy violated.

Further, 59 percent of participants in the second study said they were significantly more likely than a control group that wasn't screened to take [legal action](#) against the company for invasion of privacy. This question wasn't included in the first study.

"This research tells us that companies need to carefully weigh whatever advantage they believe they get from [social media](#) screening against the increased likelihood of alienating potential employees," says Dr. Lori Foster Thompson, a professor of psychology at NC State and co-author of the paper. "Elite job prospects have options, and are more likely to steer clear of potential employers they don't trust."

More information: The paper, "Examining Applicant Reactions to the Use of Social Networking Websites in Pre-Employment Screening," is published online in the *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10869-013-9333-6

Provided by North Carolina State University

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