

Service verifies what applicants tell employers

Written by

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HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - In a transient, often impersonal world, integrity and trust are hard to come by. Security at work and at home is highly valued and something that both individuals and companies are willing to pay for.

Our angst about trusting strangers is proving to be a business boom for those in the security industry. Background Bureau, founded over 30 years ago, has watched its business climb 25 percent during the past five years as a growing list of clients - both corporations and individuals - try to protect themselves from those out to deceive them.

At one time, pre-employment background checks were performed for a few select positions, often where an employee would have access to company cash or privileged information. Now, more new hires are subject to thorough research including criminal history, education and employment verification and possibly credit history, says Sam Paris, president and CEO of Background Bureau.

"About 30 percent of all applications

contain some type of falsehood," says Paris, noting that pre-employment screenings make up the majority of the firm's work. "More employers are sophisticated enough to know that you can't always believe what an applicant tells you."

Paris started his business in 1980 as a private investigation firm working with several large corporate clients. In the early years, Background Bureau frequently investigated individual employees at the request of a particular client due to some suspicion of illegal activity, he says.

In the 1990s, clients began requesting background checks more often, he says, and Background Bureau eventually dropped investigation work to focus solely on background research and drug testing.

The cost of running a background check varies widely. It can be as little as \$12 or more than \$150, depending on how thorough the research. Paris says Background Bureau conducts at least 4,500 background searches every month

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for clients throughout the United States and in 68 foreign countries. A detailed search includes national databases for criminal activity and research on identity and employment claims.

Businesses are not the only clients requesting background information today.

As the Internet and social networking change the ways that individuals meet and get to know each other, Background Bureau is finding new clients from online dating service users who want to find personal security in their social interactions.

Laurie Howell, founder of the Austin Dinner Club in Austin, Texas, says she hired Background Bureau to conduct research on all those who apply to be a member of the club, which is essentially a dating service.

Acceptance into the group is dependent on passing a background check that looks for criminal history and marital history among other things, says Howell.

"The whole online dating craze has kind of gotten out of control," says Howell. "We wanted to make people feel safe, especially women."

Howell says members who apply online to the club must submit to a background check by Background Bureau at their own expense. It has not been a detriment to attracting members, she says.

"The members love it," says Howell. "In the past, I've heard some people say they've been nervous after meeting people in

person who misrepresented themselves online. A few women I know have said they've been on some pretty creepy dates with people who did not depict themselves truthfully."

Personal safety is also the driving force behind another service that Background Bureau recently introduced, SafeCard.

This service verifies background checks for employees of companies that routinely send workers to private homes, such as home repair contractors, carpet cleaners and appliance repair personnel. By purchasing SafeCard, the employer is using Background Bureau to verify that their employee has been thoroughly checked to provide a greater level of security to the homeowner. The employee wears a badge, valid for one year, identifying that they have passed Background Bureau's search.

"There's a lot of holes out there in how these employees are checked," says Paris. "We provide a set of standards that comprises a competent background

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check."

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