How Important Is Social Media in the Hiring Process?

Remember when screening a candidate past the interview stage was limited to references and a credit, background or drug test? The growth of social media has introduced another dimension to the hiring process - that while on the surface appears positive, can present challenges in gaining a clear picture of a candidate - both socially and professionally. As social media is increasingly being leveraged to evaluate candidates, employers will need to determine what policies they will put in place to ensure consistency in the hiring process.

According to the 2018 Reputation Management Study conducted by **MRI**Network, nearly half (48 percent) of candidates believe their social media presence is important or very important to potential employers. "They are aware that employers can now learn a lot about them prior to meeting with them, or even before contacting them, as they seek out candidates who have the skills and personalities that will be beneficial to their organizations," says Patrick Convery, marketing manager for **MRI**Network. "Consequently, many job seekers are putting more of their social media profiles on private, or even setting up separate professional profiles, so their information can't be shared with the public."

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIRING

48% of candidates believe their social media presence is important or very important to potential employers.

35% of employers formally evaluate candidates' social media profiles, or are considering it.

39% of hiring managers say questionable content or behavior is the No. 1 thing they look for.

Source: 2018 MRINetwork Reputation Management Study

While many employers casually review candidate social media profiles, the survey reveals that 18 percent are formalizing the process, and another 17 percent say they're considering doing so in the future. But what are they looking for? Although they want to learn something about the candidate's social life or the choices they make - 39 percent of hiring managers say questionable content or behavior is the No. 1 thing they look for - they are also looking to see if the job resume is consistent with the information posted on social media by the candidate. "LinkedIn and Facebook users typically add their place of work, the college they graduated from, their hometown, and where they're currently living," observes Convery. "Prospective employers can check this information to be sure that the candidate's resume is lining up correctly with their profile information."

The Pitfalls of Overreliance on Social Media in Hiring Decisions

Not everyone updates their social media to their current situation and there are still some candidates who do not yet have a social media presence. As employers check out candidates, they may inadvertently ignore someone who is a perfect fit simply due to their lack of a social media presence or inconsistent updating of their information. "If social network users have their profiles set to private, as is becoming more common after recent breaches in security, this means they don't want the world seeing what they post, which results in an absence of the

kind of data employers are looking for to screen job applicants," says Convery.

Another risk that employers face when using social media information in the hiring process is a legal one. Employers have to be aware of the types of information they are selecting to use in the hiring process; it can be problematic to assess candidates based on their race or gender since this information is protected legally and cannot be taken into account when hiring, according to the Chicago Tribune.
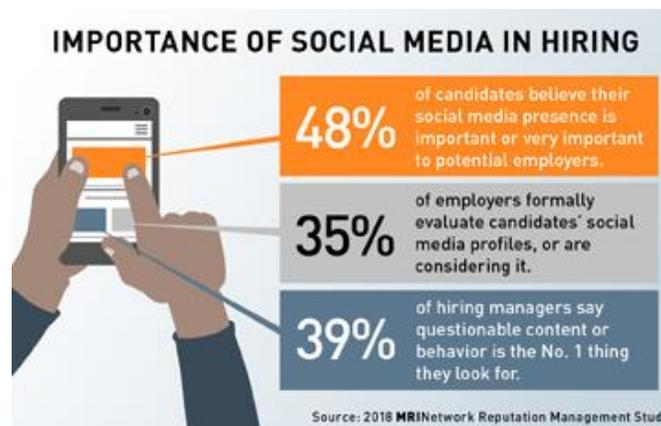
CAUTION - If you learn of a candidate's protected characteristic(s) (including age, sex, race, color, religion, and national origin) by reviewing the candidate's social media sites, you may not allow that to influence your willingness to recruit that candidate. Likewise, you should not share that information with your team.

Creating a Consistent Policy on the Use of Social Media in Hiring

If your company reviews social media profiles, it's best to establish a policy around the use of candidates' online information in the hiring process that clearly outlines when online searches should and should not be used. "By identifying positions for which searches are an important element of the process, you can develop a standard approach for how these searches will be conducted and how the information will be used," says Anne Hayden, vice president of human resources for **MRI**Network.

Hayden advises that you consider how to incorporate the following components into your policy:

- Clarity on the rationale for the use of searches
- Transparency for those using the policy and for candidates who are the subject of searches
- Consistency in terms of how searches are conducted and who conducts them
- Openness about what impact the findings will have on candidates

"When done correctly - and legally - looking at a candidate's personal profile can be a great hiring tool, but you will still gather the best insights from the personal interview," concludes Hayden. "Asking the right questions and encouraging an honest dialogue can help you get to know a candidate better than their latest post on Instagram and prevent you from passing up a great new employee."