

10 Things to Know Before You Hire a Background Screening Firm

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First let me say that you are making the correct decision to partner with a background screening firm. We live in an extremely transient and global society which makes it impossible to know your potential employees, volunteers or tenants intimately. Many criminal records are hidden behind closed doors or behind false identities on the internet. So thinking you know someone does not really mean you know them.

Quality and comprehensive background checks are the first step in exposing unsuitable applicants during the hiring process. However, the most critical decision you make will be determining the best background screening firm to partner with. Google has brought the world to our finger tips and this is a great place to start the process of locating a background check partner. But you need to do your due diligence and select the best partner for your organization and this can be a little overwhelming with all of the background screening firms on the internet. Since there are few regulations, literally anyone can start a background screening company.

The key to your success and ultimately the safety and security of your organization will be treating the background screening firm selection process as a hiring process and applying the same due diligence. Why? First, the background screening industry does not have a standard definition of what a background check consists of. Secondly, the background screening industry is a highly unregulated industry that has been built upon a foundation of cheap products and services to appeal to markets that want information instantly and cheaply.

Comprehensive background checks cannot be done instantly but they certainly can be done quickly and inexpensively. An effective background screening program does not need to dent the budget but it **cannot** be done for free. The background check is your initial investment in your new employee, tenant, volunteer or vendor.

The first step is getting beyond the marketing brochure, website or email because every company looks the same in print. The follow 10 questions must be asked and answered by each prospective background screening firm:

1. How do you define a comprehensive background check?

The background screening industry might define a background check as an instant national criminal database search or as a single county criminal search limited to 7 years.

A comprehensive background check will include at a minimum a social security number verification to validate identity, other names and develop address history. The package should also contain a multi-state or national criminal database search and county criminal search. The scope of the search should be as far back as the records allow (this could be 10-30 years depending on the jurisdiction). A search of only a multi-state or national criminal database is **not** a screening program.

2. Is the “national background check” instant?

If so then this is not a comprehensive screening program. There does not exist a single criminal database, not even the FBI database, that contains all criminal records. More than half of U.S. states only provide limited information to proprietary criminal databases which includes Department of Correction and sex offender registry records. Some states provide records from select counties and a handful of states provide criminal data from their Administrative Office of the Courts. Criminal databases are a tool not a screening program.

3. What is the cost of your background check?

The price of a comprehensive background check will always exceed \$10. If the background checks are \$10 or less then they are a cheap instant database search and not a comprehensive screening program. If a background screening firm indicates that a national criminal database is a viable background screening option then they are placing profit above protection.

If this is an employment or tenant background check then the Fair Credit Reporting Act **requires** that the information be “up-to-date” and databases or “stored data” do not qualify as up-to-date under the FCRA.

4. How far back do your criminal searches go?

The background screening industry standard is 7 years. This is a critical question because it generally is not addressed in a pricing proposal.

Safe Hiring Solutions feels it is important to search back as far as possible and provide an accurate snap-shot of an applicant's background. A sex offender with a record more than 10 years old is still critically important to our clients. We will filter your records through the FCRA and state laws to ensure the information is reportable in your jurisdiction.

5. How do you handle alias & other names?

The background screening industry standard is to search only the name provided. This includes names that are entered incorrectly. If alias or other names are searched then beware of sticker shock as these names are often treated as additional search requests.

Safe Hiring Solutions provides packages with alias names included to mitigate your risk of an unsuitable employee, volunteer, tenant or contractor and ensure the background check is completed correctly.

6. How is your criminal database configured? Does it allow for null or void DOB searches?

Proprietary databases are usually configured to search with name and DOB. However, many states do **not** provide full DOB's when they report records. Some provide no DOB's and others provide partial DOB's. If a database is configured for full DOB then data from these states will often be excluded.

Safe Hiring Solutions uses a database that is configured to search looking for a name and DOB match then re-search and void the DOB and look for name-match only. This requires significant labor on our part as we have to search through "possible" name matches but we find the proverbial "needle in the haystack" daily.

7. How do you screen your employees that are handling our sensitive data?

It is not unusual for background screening firms to apply the same low quality background check standards to their applicants who will be handling your sensitive data.

Safe Hiring Solutions is extremely selective and the process begins with a detailed application which is then compared to data throughout the screening process. Step two

is an interview with the CEO and managers individually. The third step, after a conditional offer is made, is an extensive background check including references, employment and education verifications, employment credit report, criminal background check which includes National Criminal Database, Federal Courts and ALL counties of current and past residence, and motor vehicle records. The last step is a final interview with the CEO.

8. How do you handle the sensitive data including social security numbers that we submit to you for processing of our background checks?

The organization should maintain an ongoing security certification of their online system like CyberTrust, or SAS 70 Type II or SSAE 16 which exceeds the requirements of the standard SAS 70.

Safe Hiring Solutions is SSAE 16 certified as well as PCI compliant. We have our main server in Charlotte, NC with a redundant server in Nashville, TN.

9. Do you assist us with legal compliance?

Background screening firms, which are defined as Consumer Reporting Agencies under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, are required to have a service agreement with all of their clients that address issues related to FCRA compliance. However, this information is terribly confusing and challenging to comply with unless it is clearly understood by end users.

Safe Hiring Solutions provides online training tutorials, webinars, sample forms and frequent blog posts from our CEO and legal counsel to help our clients comply with the FCRA, EEOC and state and local laws.

10. Who handles our questions when they come up?

Questions are a natural, normal and a frequent part of the background screening process. Many large background screening firms have attempted to automate this process which makes finding an answer to your questions difficult and frustrating.

Safe Hiring Solutions assigns a Client Services Representative to you and they are responsible for processing your reports, answering questions via email or phone and ensuring your reports are processed in a timely manner. Our technology is cutting edge but our customer service is old school. Give us a test and pick up the phone and call us during business hours 8AM- 5PM EST 888-215-8296 and see if we answer.



In summary, a qualified background screening firm should willingly answer each of these questions and if they cannot then you need to move on in your selection process. Do not place the safety and security of your organization in the hands of a background screening firm that is cutting corners or providing low quality products and services.

The Safe Hiring Solutions mission statement is very simple: We exist to keep you safe.

If you are ready to do background screening correctly then give us a call at 888-215-8296 or go to www.safehiringsolutions.com and click on Become a Client.