

## **Background Checks by Francesca Black**

If you have ever been employed, chances are good that you've had a background check run on you. Employers looking for reliable, trustworthy individuals will often use these reports to confirm that information given on a resume is true and ensure that they are hiring persons of high standards. But what is included in a background check? Do you have control over who can access your report? How can you find out what is on your record?

What is included in a background check? Specific details of an individual's past are revealed in a background check for purposes of employment. Depending on the company providing the background check, your report may include a range of information, including: criminal records, litigation records, driving and vehicle records, education records, licensing records, military records, social security number, property ownership, credit records, employment history, worker's compensation, medical records, sex offenders list, and interpersonal interviews (with neighbors and other character references). Some services offer nothing more than the information given in a phone book, while others employ private investigators that offer the whole gamut of information. Most employers hire an outside company to give them the type of information that is pertinent to the job you are being considered for.

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act bankruptcies more than ten years old; civil suits, judgments, and records of arrest more than seven years old; paid tax liens after seven years; accounts placed for collection after seven years; and any other negative information (other than criminal convictions) after seven years cannot be reported in a background check.

Do you have control over who can access your report? While some feel they have nothing to hide in a background check, concerns over submitting to one are certainly valid. Some applicants fear that employers can dig into the past in ways that are unrelated to their jobs. In addition, a background check may include information that is illegal to use for hiring, or comes from questionable sources.

When you complete an application for employment you must give your consent for a background check to be run. This is one reason why it is so important to be open and honest if there is anything in your past that may show up on your record. In some fields a clean background check is required by law for employment or to even qualify to give volunteer work, such as jobs where individuals interact with children and youth, elderly, or disabled people. Jobs that require an individual to cross the nation's borders or involve transporting goods or people will also require successful background checks. It is easy to understand why background checks would be required in such cases. In some states it is also mandatory to pass a background check in order to purchase a handgun or other restricted firearms.

Some recent controversy has risen over whether dating services should be allowed to process background checks. Services contend that they want to supply their clients with peace of mind that the people they meet within the system are upstanding citizens, while others contend that personal information should be volunteered by clients at their own discretion, just as it is in the "real world."

How can you find out what is on your record? It is in your best interest to check and update all aspects of your background check, regardless of the type of employment you are looking for. For instance, an employer may review your credit history as a means of judging your reliability, regardless of whether you will be working with money or not. It is also important to note that if you have been arrested for DUI or DWI, this is not considered a minor traffic infraction, and the failure to report it can result in being denied employment based on falsifying a form.

If you are entering the job market, and you have any concern about your record, you can hire a company to run a background check for you. Companies are listed in the yellow pages, and there are several services on-line. Most of the information is a matter of public records created by government agencies. You can certainly search out your own information.

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