Best Practice Guide for Choosing a Background Screening Partner

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The crucial task of selecting a trustworthy background screening partner can be a difficult one, and options continue to grow as the industry expands and technology evolves. Your background screening partner is a key component of your talent screening and selection process, so finding the right partner with the right fit for your screening program is paramount. That partner should support your hiring process by delivering timely, accurate, and compliant information of the highest quality while delivering industry leading customer service.

Expertise and Length of Experience

The background screening profession has evolved dramatically over the past three decades. Some of the biggest changes are in the legal landscape, technology, and service offerings. You need a partner that is experienced and exhibits a long-standing reputation in the field. Conduct some online research and look for evidence of thought-leadership over time. A knowledgeable screening firm will share information and resources directly on their site by publishing white papers, articles and blogs. In addition, conduct research on the firm's leadership team, this will provide solid insight into the expertise of the firm's executive management team.

Industry Involvement and Credentials

Industry related associations represent the nucleus of education, best practice, advocacy, and industry governance. The background screening industry is no different. The National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS) is the global voice and guiding association of the screening industry. Association involvement provides critical resources to stay current with the ever-changing legislative landscape, compliance mandates, best practice techniques and new solutions. NAPBS members better understand information privacy and security, advancements in screening technology and available resources. In addition, the association fosters certification programs for members to test and show their knowledge of FCRA compliance.

Companies prove their commitment to industry best practices and standards by becoming accredited. Only a small number of companies are accredited through the NAPBS Background Screening Agency Accreditation Program. Accredited firms demonstrate their diligence and dedication to their clients through solid performance in crucial areas such as information security, legal compliance, client education, researcher and data standards, verification standards and overall business practices. Each is vetted thoroughly by an independent auditor before receiving the accreditation badge of excellence. A commitment to accreditation is a pledge to the background screening industry and ensures employers receive the highest quality of information while serving the best interests of candidates through privacy and compliance.

Service Capabilities and Your Customized Needs

The benefits and risk reduction strategies demanded of a background screening program are unique to each employer. Company size, structure, industry, and job description are all key factors that play into the decision-making process. Trying to fit every screening program into the same mold will not work. You need to rely on a screening partner that can walk you through all of the options. Custom packages that are specific to a particular job function will provide the best benefit and value for your program. HR professionals who oversee several decentralized locations can leverage automation to receive consistent screening while ensuring compliance with company policy, as well as state and federal laws.

Employers hiring internationally will require a partner that has an in-depth knowledge of international screening protocols. Consolidating services such as background screening, drug testing, occupational health screening

solutions, E-Verify and paperless I-9 compliance requirements can save time and money. The use of multiple software platforms, managing multiple vendors, and reconciling several invoices is not an efficient use of your time. A one-stop solution partner can consolidate management reporting, provide for a consistent program review and provide opportunities for additional savings based on consolidated volume.

Technology that Supports Business Optimization and Your Onboarding Process

Your background screening program should fit strategically within your hiring and onboarding process; not be held at the mercy and convenience of your screening partner. A seamless integration with your provider can optimize your hiring process and save you considerable data-entry and processing time. Leveraging the use of a self-serve applicant kiosk or electronic candidate portal can make the application process integrated, virtual and candidate friendly.

A seamless integration with your screening partner can securely route candidate data, paperless forms, and an e-signature process from your applicant tracking system through to your screening partner and back to an HRIS system. Compliance can be achieved virtually too with the use of service specific disclosures, federal, state and internationally required notifications and forms. All can be served up automatically as need. A paperless storage environment makes it easy to retrieve information and maintain proper compliance.

Client Onboarding, Training, and Program Reviews

The day you sign the contract with your new provider shouldn't be the last time you hear from them. Establish the process for onboarding, training, and program review upfront to ensure a smooth transition.

Background screening technology platforms can be very customizable these days. Once you determine what you need, you can start setting the parameters to fit your needs. It is essential to decide who is authorized to request and review screening results. For multi-location users, this piece is paramount to ensure legal compliance and proper setup for management administration and review.

Training is an integral part of the onboarding process. Be sure that your provider offers customized live training to address specific training needs and questions before the program starts. Ongoing training should also be available for future users, and insist that your partner provides resource material and training documentation for future reference. The success of your screening program should be benchmarked and measured on an ongoing basis. Establish key performance indicators (KPIs) upfront and measure them on a periodic basis to track performance.

Approach and Structure to Account Management and Customer Service

Customer support is a key component of a successful screening program. You should have a firm understanding of the support team working with you and how they gauge your satisfaction. Will you be assigned an individual account representative, and is there a support team working with them for strategic account administration? In addition, you should ask about the structure of their customer service team, off-hours support and the use of overseas call centers to make sure they meet your specific support needs.

Quality Management and Customer Satisfaction

Background screening firms concerned with quality and customer satisfaction take strategic measures to incorporate a quality management system into their core operating principles. A successful quality management system will include documented procedures and training for each business function. The firm should be measuring specific inputs and outputs as they relate to each function within the process. Benchmarking and measurements around timeliness, accuracy, compliance and your satisfaction should be measured and reviewed on a constant basis. This is used to gauge quality and your level of overall satisfaction as a basis for continual improvement. A background screening firm dedicated to quality will have a comprehensive program already in place. The customer service team should continually seek your feedback and act on that information to increase overall quality and your satisfaction.

Data Privacy, Security and Business Continuity

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The concern over data privacy and protecting personally identifiable information (PII) is real in today's landscape of growing identity theft. Background screening firms that are focused on data security incorporate strict measures in all facets of information security. Be sure your trusted screening partner already has a security policy, information security procedures and training, documented procedures to deal with security incidents, access control policies and risk mitigation strategies to ensure business continuity.

Legislation concerning data privacy is ever-changing and must be monitored for constant compliance. Be sure your provider has a solid grasp of both international and domestic data privacy and security. A concerned partner will follow the new Privacy Shield Framework to comply with the European Union and Swiss Commission's Directive on Data Protection. In addition, concerned partners will not offshore sensitive client and candidate data overseas. Once sensitive data leaves the United States, there are no guarantees of data protection or secured access to PII. No employer wants to be burdened with the liabilities of an applicant's data being mishandled.

Responsible Use of Database Information

Criminal record searchers are available in a variety of government and privately held electronic databases. This information can be alluring to employers that want to save money and time. This type of information is a critical research tool; however it should never be used as a sole source of data to conduct a criminal background check.

The quality of a criminal records database will vary from source to source with no guarantees of data quality or even significant identifiers to match your candidate. Responsible background screeners verify criminal records data from the original reporting court to ensure current and reportable information within the legal guidelines of the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) and state law. Using unverified data to make a hiring decision can create additional liabilities for employers and a very unpleasant candidate experience.

Compliance Resources and Support

Legal compliance within the background screening industry is ever-changing and opens up potential liability for employers if not followed closely. The Fair Credit Report Act (FCRA), state local, and international laws must be followed for proper compliance. Your background screening provider should be your resource for a compliant screening program.

Your partner should provide documentation such as compliant authorization and disclosure forms along with state compliance notifications and resources. Laws can differ county to county, state to state and even country to country. Your partner should provide resources and guidance to make sure your program is compliant at all times. Be sure to speak with your representative about how the company will provide mandatory compliance information and how legal changes will be maintained and communicated. Your provider should have a compliance team that is focused on current compliance protocols and keep their pulse on ever-changing legislation that could affect your screening program.

Conclusion

Conducting proper due diligence on your potential screening partner, and addressing the topics provided within this guide, will ensure that the provider you choose has the capabilities and expertise to handle your customized needs. A suitable partner will understand quality, information security and have the technology to optimize your program. Establishing a relationship based on specific measurements of mutual success will establish a program that is seamless, cost-effective, efficient, and compliant.

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Mr. Robert E. Capwell is considered one of the leading experts in the background screening industry with over 26 years of experience in the field. As Chief Knowledge Officer at EBI, Mr. Capwell oversees the implementation of process improvement and information security strategies as EBI's Management Review Board Chair. Robert is also responsible for internal corporate training strategies and serves on EBI's Executive Team. Robert is a well-known industry speaker and past Chair of the NAPBS Board of Directors. Currently, Mr. Capwell serves as a Global Ambassador for the organization.