

Social media is making it easier for candidates to misrepresent themselves. Simon Kent investigates.

WHO ARE YOU?

The problem of detecting whether a CV is accurate or, shall we say, a little embellished has always been a hazard of recruiting someone. However, the use of social media, combined with unemployment and the ongoing 'war for talent' has exacerbated the situation. LinkedIn is only one online arena where information is sometimes not worth face value – is an endorsement really meaningful? But if proper screening is to be carried out when should this happen? The last thing a client wants to do is wait for their talent to arrive – although perhaps this is preferable to finding you've just employed someone who can't actually do the job they said they could. "We recently polled 1700 companies and that showed 73 per cent of employers are checking social media profiles before offering positions," says Anna Taylor, co-Founder of RecruitmentRevolution.com. "But clearly that doesn't negate the need for thorough interview techniques. In all cases recruiters should use due diligence to ensure they know the candidate is who they claim to be on their CV."

Aside from making further investigations into work portfolios and qualifications, Taylor advocates the use of skills, technical and psychometric testing to ensure the individual truly is up to scratch. Rather than simply ensuring everything on the CV makes sense it may be worth ensuring that person can do tasks similar to those required by the job. Taylor notes some of these can even be completed online thereby reducing time and logistic challenges associated with getting someone to take a test.

Taking the CV as only the starting point echoes with the approach advocated by Colin McKinnon, a Consultant at the Chemistry Group. McKinnon and his colleagues believe that past experience is an unreliable predictor of future performance and as a result the company have designed a psychometric model based on Intellect, Values, Motivations, Behaviours and finally, Experience. They see the CV as a document which should contain only the 'must haves' – the items that can be covered by ticking the appropriate boxes. Once that level of matching has been completed the recruiter must then search elsewhere in order to find the elements which will show whether the candidate will be successful or unsuccessful in their potential future job. "It's about the recruiter getting under the skin of the candidate and understanding them more," says McKinnon. "That's where they have to start adding value."

One of the problems that McKinnon sees is that because many recruiters are incentivised and therefore driven purely by numbers – how many candidates can you offer, how many vacancies can you fill – there can be less motivation to take the time to find the right match. In such a scenario a resource like LinkedIn becomes extremely attractive – here's a searchable database of global talent which will probably throw out some highly eligible candidates: "The route to the candidate has



changed and become more social and online – much less telephone based," observes McKinnon. "The first thing about that is it brings some benefits because you get more candidates quicker, however it can also breed lazy recruiters."

McKinnon says there isn't really a way that recruiters can prevent candidates from misrepresenting themselves online, so the only answer must be to pick up the phone and talk to them as soon as possible. By doing this the recruiter can immediately suss out whether the candidate really is who they say they are, can do what they say and so on. "Even if all you're working off is your gut feeling when you're talking to them on the phone, it's still very valuable to speak to them directly," he concludes.

Senior roles

Interestingly the problem of candidate misrepresentation tends to reduce the more senior the role under question. On the one hand, says David Dumeresque of Tyzack, it can be more difficult for people in senior positions to actually be able to get away with being liberal with the truth about their careers, on the other hand, if an individual is very senior they may not be on something like LinkedIn at all. An effective search for a senior executive of board level appoint – such as those carried out by Tyzack can circumnavigate this issue entirely by relying on personal recommendation. The recruitment exercise in this →

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instance, goes directly to verifying someone's performance through a third party – or through a number of third parties – hopefully delivering an independent view of the individual rather than an attempted sales pitch.

"Never trust anything you see on LinkedIn unless you verify it yourself," advises Dumeresque. "The way we would use LinkedIn is to check up on who knows who and so on and get some sort of a triangulation on people."

Dumeresque also acknowledges the site as being very useful for networking and getting introduced to people but once again the online site is being used as a starting point or just another reference tool rather than a repository for accurate information.

Tony Wilmot, co-Founder of Staffbay.com claims he set up their site in order to offer recruiters a better resource for finding and verifying talent. Describing the site as being pitched between social media and a job board, candidates can upload their usual CV details, but they can also upload videos, documents showing past achievements and link up with past employers so they can act as referees. In this way it should then be easier for recruiters to verify what their candidate can or can't do before making contact.

"We were finding if you were searching for people online and even through the job boards then as many as nine out of 10 just weren't suitable," says Wilmot. "In some instances they didn't have the skills they claimed, but in other cases you'd find they weren't available any more. You'd have spent two days sourcing and not have anyone to take further along the process."

Social media moves on

While Wilmot believes Staffbay hits the right balance of information for recruiters and through its privacy settings allows the candidate to stay in control of how they are presented, he also thinks that as time goes by what is acceptable in the social media arena will change.

"Previously job seekers wouldn't want to put all this information online, but now for the 18-25 age group it's just normal. In another five years the reservations we have now will be a distant memory," he says.

Rather than agonising over when and how candidate checks should take place, Peter Holliday, Managing Director of Steria Recruitment has pursued an approach which to some extent avoids the issue entirely. Having considered that screening every candidate who comes into contact with the company would be over-kill, and realising that screening them before they were finally presented to their clients would slow down appointments, the company have created discrete candidate pools, designed to meet the needs of their clients. Within each pool are held individuals who would be a good fit for opportunities



which may arise in the future, and crucially every individual's credentials have been thoroughly checked out already.

Once placed in a talent pool a candidate's status is kept up to date, partly through automated requests from the system to the candidate, but also through the recruitment company's work to make the candidate feel positive about being a part of this resource: "We ask for updates and that can be driven by something as basic as when was the last time the information was updated," says Holliday, "But we also try to make it interesting for the candidate. We tell them they're in the talent pool and that we're working with people who are interested in their skills. It means they feel they're a part of something and want to stay in touch with us." Likewise, for their clients, the ability to offer access to a relevant, available and reliable source of talent makes Steria an attractive prospect. Not only are the company constantly in touch with the industry at grass roots level, but data can be taken from the talent pools to demonstrate the volume and shape of the talent they have available at any one time.

Just as Wilmot recognises social media will move on and this will affect how the recruitment sector can use online resources, Holliday doesn't think Steria's solution is the perfect answer – it's just something that works now and answers some of the challenges of finding clearly skilled candidates.

If recruiters are to demonstrate real value to their clients – over and above that which could be delivered by an in-house function or even by a less scrupulous operator, it must be in the area of candidate accuracy. Finding the right person for the right organisation is not a tick-box activity, it requires care and consideration. While ensuring candidates are who they say they are and can do what they claim can sometimes seem a very basic part of recruitment, but depending on how it is handled it could be the key to offering something different and valuable. ■