

## Facebook in Hiring

The use of social media sites like facebook has skyrocketed in recent years. One study suggests that more than half of all Americans over the age of 12 have a facebook account. For many, facebook and Twitter are important ways to interact socially and even to define who they are -- a phenomenon which is increasingly being monitored by potential employers.

An increasing number of employers are requesting that job applicants grant them access to social media accounts, or even ask applicants to hand over their passwords. Future Virginia State Troopers, for example, are required to sign into their accounts during the interview process and let an administrator look through their information. Virginia State Police spokeswoman Corinne Geller argues, "It's a virtual character check as much as the rest of the process is a physical background check." Indeed, one may argue that the drug- and lie-detector tests already required of applicants by many companies are far more invasive than a check of one's online profile. Viewed in this light, a facebook check may simply offer the company a more comprehensive impression of their applicants. In a world in which public opinion can have a severe impact on business performance, industry representatives argue that it is vital for the company to know exactly whom they hire and how these employees will behave not just at work but also after hours. Employers, they believe, have not only an incentive but a right and obligation to know whom they hire.

But many have protested that to request an applicant's facebook account is not simply another background check but rather a serious invasion of her privacy, akin to requesting to read her mail or text messages. And it is not only in the applicant's interest to have her privacy respected; having access to social media accounts may also expose potential employers to information which they do not want to know. Many facebook users, for example, post personal information such as marital status, sexual orientation or religious affiliation on their online profiles, information about which employers are not allowed to inquire about during the interview process to prevent possible accusations of discrimination. If employers are inadvertently exposed to this information, they may find themselves in situations in which they are unable to render unbiased decisions. Indeed, American Civil Liberties Union staff attorney Catherine Stump cautioned that the practice may put employers at risk for privacy and discrimination lawsuits and could at times be in violation of the Fourth Amendment.

Although there are currently no legal guidelines regulating employers' screening practices of applicants' social media accounts, a facebook spokesperson stated the company is looking forward to "engaging with policy makers" to discourage the practice in the future.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should employers be allowed to request access to applicants' social media profiles?
2. To what extent, if at all, can it be considered morally permissible for an employer to invade a potential employee's privacy in order to identify the ideal applicant?