

# CAREER CREATORS NEWSLETTER

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## Background Screening

Investigating the Candidate’s History

**Amber Travis-Ballinas**

*Career Consultant*

There are many quick and inexpensive methods utilized today by employers to check the background and history of the candidates applying for employment with their companies.

### TYPES of EMPLOYMENT SCREENING:

- Criminal Background Investigation
- Driving Record Investigation
- Credit History Investigation
- Electronic / Internet Image & Profiles
- Past Employment / Employer References
- Military Service History
- Educational / Training Records Investigation
- Drug / Alcohol / Tobacco Screens
- Physical / Emotional Examinations

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## Image Enhancement

*The Electronic Image & Profile*

**Linda Wedick**

*Image Consultant*

Your digital identity is more important now than ever before. To be hired in this tight labor market—one must stand out in person and digitally, as well.

Employers are using search engines increasingly as a type of ‘digital background check’, and 43% admit to passing on a applicant based on information found during these online searches.

86% of employers and recruiters polled agreed that if they found sexually suggestive content, evidence of hard partying, or other unflattering behavior when investigating an applicant’s online profile—they would not consider making a job offer to this candidate.

*Creating a positive electronic image requires proactive management of your ‘digital reputation’.*

The first step in managing your digital profile is to discover what currently exists.

- Enter your name (enclosed in quotation marks) into any online search engine

The second step of managing your digital image is doing the necessary damage control.

- “Untag” any inappropriate photos
- Set your Facebook and MySpace privacy settings to ‘private’ / ‘friends only’
- Delete any blog entries, tweets, or photos that create an unprofessional image
- Create a “LinkedIn.com” professional networking account and complete the profile information
- Create your own web page ❖

***Employers believe that past behavior is predictive of future behavior.***

### **THEME OF THIS ISSUE:**

#### **JOB SEARCH & BACKGROUND CHECKS**

- 1** *Background Investigations—Commonly Used Methods*  
*Image Enhancement – The Electronic Image & Profile*
- 2** *Professional References – “Effectively Using Verbal & Written References”*  
*Background Investigations—continued*
- 3** *SideBar Article— How to Respond to the “Felony Box”*  
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- 4** *Additional Resources—valuable information and links*  
*Professional References—Written References*
- 5** *FREE Career Advice—links and Contact Information*

Employers believe that past behavior is predictive of future behavior. Many employers require some type of background or history screen as a condition of employment and use this information to assist in making the hiring decision.

The purpose of the background check varies by organization—usually depending on the type of job duties and responsibilities performed by the employees.

Most organizations require basic criminal history background checks and drug screens in an effort to provide a safe and secure environment for their employees and to avoid expensive litigation.

Other companies might require a credit history screen if employees regularly handle negotiable instruments or have access to private client data.

Organizations which have employees driving both company and private vehicles will typically require a driving record screen as a condition of employment.

Increasingly, employers will simply search the internet for an online profile of their candidates and review any information which appears online and within various social networking sites.

Employers are legally required to acquire written permission from applicants to conduct a formal background screen. Employers are legally prohibited from using the information found during such an investigation to discriminate against the applicant—with the exception of violent crimes or convictions which are substantially or reasonably related to the functions or qualifications of the position for which they are applying .

It is advisable for anyone in the process of seeking employment to conduct a personal background screen. (See “ADDITIONAL RESOURCES” section on page 4.)

During the job search; applicants should expect to be asked to provide private information--such as date of birth, social security number, and current and previous addresses—and consent to various background screens as a part of the application process.

\*It is wise to be cautious when providing private information to potential employers.

- Never enter personal information onto a web site unless there is an “https:” secure web site guarantee.
- Never allow employers to photocopy your driver’s license or social security card.
- Never provide private data over the phone or via email. ❖

## Professional References

### Making the Most of a Verbal Reference

**Amber Travis-Ballinas**

*Career Consultant*

The majority of employers will request professional references at some point during the selection process. Commonly, three references are requested as a part of the formal application document.

It is important to have between three to five professional references-which are immediately available to speak to a potential employer-to include on the application and with the job search documents.

If a candidate omits references when applying for a position, employers might infer that the candidate does not know anyone who would be willing to speak positively about the applicant’s capabilities, experience, and background.

### **Verbal References:**

An applicant should always be certain that a hiring manager has at least three professional references that they could easily contact who will vouch for the suitability of the candidate—either verbally or via email.

The applicant must provide the contact information for each reference including their name, current or past position / title and company name, daytime phone number, and email address.

Additionally, it is helpful to include a brief explanation of the manner in which the applicant is acquainted with the reference, for example, ‘*Former Supervisor at XYZ Company*’.

Current and former employers are limited regarding the data and information that may be shared as a verbal reference; due to various privacy and legal liability concerns.

An applicant can expect that a current or former employer will only verify the applicant’s previous title, duties / responsibilities, dates of employment, salary range, and whether or not the former employee would be eligible for rehire.

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## SIDEBAR ARTICLE:

### **THE “FELONY BOX” ON THE EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION**

A FELONY CONVICTION WILL NOT NECESSARILY BAR A CANDIDATE FROM EMPLOYMENT—WITH TWO EXCEPTIONS:

- A CONVICTION RELATED TO A VIOLENT CRIME I.E. MURDER, ASSAULT, & RAPE
- A CONVICTION WHICH IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR REASONABLY RELATED TO THE FUNCTIONS OR QUALIFICATIONS OF THE POSITION FOR WHICH THEY ARE APPLYING I.E. THEFT OR EMBEZZLEMENT

THIS QUESTION **DOES NOT** APPLY TO CONVICTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN EXPUNGED, SEALED, PARDONED, OR OTHERWISE EXONERATED OR ERADICATED.

NOR DOES THIS QUESTION APPLY TO PRIOR ARRESTS WHICH DID NOT RESULT IN A FELONY CONVICTION.

IF ANSWERING “**Yes**” TO THIS QUESTION:

- DESCRIBE FULLY THE CONVICTION INCLUDING THE NATURE, DATES, AND REHABILITATION SINCE THEN

**Any omissions, misrepresentations, or false information provided on the employment application may result in the rejection of the application, future discipline, or termination; if already hired, and automatically disqualifies the candidate for unemployment benefits!!! ❖**

Therefore, it is wise for applicants to include a mix of reference types including one former employer, one former supervisor / client / subordinate / or coworker, and one professional affiliate.

It is best to include one reference who is not bound by privacy or liability issues who will offer a potential employer a broad view of the candidate’s background, capabilities, and suitability for the specific position.

### **Criteria for a Professional Reference:**

- Known applicant for minimum of 2 years
- Knowledgeable about applicant’s character, work habits, capabilities, and overall suitability for employment
- Use only professional contacts, such as;
  - Current or former supervisors
  - Current or former coworkers
  - Current or former clients, distributors, or suppliers
  - Current or former subordinates
  - Teachers or Coaches
  - Affiliates from Professional Associations or Organizations

**Do not** use your family, friends, a priest, reverend, or rabbi as a reference--unless they are / were your employer!!!

### **Reference Rules to Remember:**

- The applicant should first ask permission of the reference before providing the references’ personal contact information to an employer.
- The applicant should inform their references when they are actively searching for a job.
- The applicant should give the references details about the types of employers and positions for which they are applying.
- The reference document should be a separate document--independent of the resume.
- The job applicant’s complete contact information should be included in the first section of the reference document.
- The applicant should provide reference information

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

FREE EMPLOYMENT CONSULTATIONS TO ASSIST WITH ISSUES RELATED TO BACKGROUND CHECKS:

WORKSOURCE SOLUTIONS—CAPITAL AREA

[WWW.WFSCAPITALAREA.COM](http://WWW.WFSCAPITALAREA.COM)

1-800-735-2988

GOODWILL JOB HELP CENTERS AUSTIN

[WWW.AUSTINGOODWILL.ORG](http://WWW.AUSTINGOODWILL.ORG)

512-480-0772

FOR FREE INFORMATION REGARDING YOUR PRIVACY RIGHTS AS AN EMPLOYMENT CANDIDATE:

PRIVACY RIGHTS CLEARINGHOUSE

[HTTP://WWW.PRIVACYRIGHTS.ORG/FS/FS16-BCK.HTM](http://WWW.PRIVACYRIGHTS.ORG/FS/FS16-BCK.HTM)

TO CONDUCT A BACKGROUND OR CREDIT CHECK:

BEENVERIFIED.COM

[HTTP://WWW.BEENVERIFIED.COM/](http://WWW.BEENVERIFIED.COM/)

BACKGROUNDCHECKS.COM

[HTTP://WWW.BACKGROUNDCHECKS.COM/](http://WWW.BACKGROUNDCHECKS.COM/)

FREE CREDIT REPORT

[WWW.ANNUALCREDITREPORT.COM](http://WWW.ANNUALCREDITREPORT.COM)



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**83% of executive recruiters polled admitted to using the internet to investigate a candidate's background and history.**

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## Professional References

### *Making the Most of Written References*

By Amber Travis-Ballinas, Career Consultant

### **Letters of Recommendation / Commendation**

A formal *letter of recommendation* or a *letter of commendation* is a favorable letter written by a professional source endorsing a candidate for employment. Possessing either of these documents will differentiate a candidate from their competition during the selection process.

In a highly competitive job market; many employers will make a hiring decision based on which candidate has the best references. Therefore, it is advisable to have between three to five professional references who will provide verbal praise **and** one or two letters of recommendation or commendation.

Letters of recommendation and commendation are not necessarily required during the job search, but they are potentially invaluable. These documents are a different form of reference document. They are a written testimonial to the character, skills, education, experience, and capabilities of an applicant.

If possible, each letter should be written by an additional professional contact which is not a verbal reference--which will provide the employer with as broad a view of the candidate as possible.

### **“Brag Books”**

A ‘Brag Book’ is a type of written reference which is a valuable tool for candidates to use during the in-person interview. This reference will include a wide variety of information assembled in a portfolio notebook which can be viewed by a potential employer during an interview.

### **Documents to include in a “Brag Book”:**

- Positive Performance Reviews
- Client and Supplier Commendations
- Mystery Shopper Reports
- “Thank You” Letters / Notes / Cards
- Award Certificates
- Certificates for Completion of Specialized Training Classes
- Press Releases, Media Articles, Video and Digital Archives

Assemble the “Brag Book” using clear, plastic document holders and a professional portfolio three-ring binder which can be purchased at any office supply store. Use the book as a tool and refer its contents

## **FREE CAREER ADVICE**

Listen to the 55 minute audio & visual presentations with Q & A sessions:

“Acing the Interview Process”

<https://meeting.austin.utexas.edu/p83189528/>

“Win-Win Negotiations”

<https://meeting.austin.utexas.edu/p67654174/>

“Tips & Tactics for Career Success”

<https://meeting.austin.utexas.edu/p64675740/>

“Navigating the Job Search Process”

<https://meeting.austin.utexas.edu/p31133638/>

View this series of webinars and download the MS PowerPoint presentations by clicking on the following link and then choosing the webinar from the list:

<http://www.mcombs.utexas.edu/alumni/careers/programming/>

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<http://CareerDesignSpecialists.wordpress.com>

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