

Maryland Career Development Association

MCDA Officers

President

Lakeisha Moore Mathews

President-Elect

Jose Reyes Torres

Immediate Past-President

Michelle Carroll

Treasurer

Marilyn E. Maze, PhD

Secretary

Paula Brand, GCDF, CPRW

Standing Committee Chairs

Membership Chair

Elda Schwartz, MCC, GCDFI, LCPC

Communications/Public Relations Chair

Karol Taylor, GCDFI

Nominations Committee Chair

Michelle Carroll

By-Laws Committee

Amanda Baker

Ethics Committee

Vacant

Special Committees

Technology Chair - Webmaster

Amanda Baker

Credentialing Chair

Rose Howard



August 2011

In This Issue

- **Why are Men Paid More Than Women?**
- **NCDA Merit Award to Janet Wall**
- **President's Message**
- **Members on the Move**
- **It's Crunch Time**
- **Save the Date**
- **Summer Professional Development Opportunities**
- **CDF Program for Teachers**
- **Going from "If It Bleeds, It Leads to If They Lead, They Succeed"**
- **Interviewing -- Another Perspective**
- **CDF Program Starts in October**
- **Book Review: Networking for the Novice, Nervous or Naive**
- **A Few Tips on Effectively Using Social Media**
- **Social Screening of Job Candidates: Focusing on the Facts**

Awards Chair

Raymond Holmes, GCDF

Newsletter Editor and Job Board

Janet Wall, EdD, CDFI, MCDP

Chair Legislative/ Employer Relations

China Wilson

Event Registrar and Email Monitor

Maria Schaeffer

Mentoring/Student Outreach Committee Chair

Tiffani Williams

Program Development/Programs Committee Chair

Jose Torres-Reyes

National Career Development Month Chair

Lakeisha Moore Mathews

**QUESTIONS? Contact MCDA.
mail@MDcareers.org**

Why Are Men Paid More Than Women?

Marilyn Maze presented on this topic at the NCDCA Conference and a short version of her talk was published in the May issue of [Career Convergence](#). Her talk was stimulated by data published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics comparing 1970 with 2009, a 40-year period in which women have made a great deal of progress. In 1970, women were paid 55 cents for each dollar earned by men, while in 2009, they were paid 80 cents for each dollar earned by men. Reasons given for the discrepancy in pay include:

1. Women have less education
2. Women spend less time working, so they are not as experienced as men
3. Women's work pays less than men (historically, this has always been true)
4. Women take time out for family responsibilities which disrupts their advancement
5. Women choose positions that offer a better quality of life rather than choosing the positions with the highest salaries and advancement opportunities
6. Men in positions of power see other men as being more promotable

The first point is no longer true. In 2009, at least 50% of all levels of degrees were awarded to women and the percentage of women students in higher education is much higher than 50%. The second point is still true - while women participated in the labor market at a higher rate in 2009 than in 1970, their participation rate is still 83% that of men. Related to the third point, a quick look at salaries by Holland type reveals that interest areas where women are more prevalent continue to pay less. Recent studies looking at differences in compensation for equally qualified men and women reaffirm points four through six. Women have made tremendous progress in the last 40 years, but the remaining gap between the earning power of men and women shows evidence of persistence.

Submitted by **Marilyn Maze**. Contact her at mazemd@hotmail.com.



**Dr. Janet Wall receives the NCDCA 2011 Merit Award
at the Annual Conference Award's Luncheon**

To see the citation go to <http://www.janetwall.net/NCDAMeritAward.php>

President's Message

Many of us just returned from the National Career Development Association (NCDA) conference in San Antonio, Texas where the theme was *Celebrating Our Past: Achieving Our Dreams*. It was great to be amongst other career colleagues, learning from one another, catching up with old friends and being re-energized. I left the conference encouraged and inspired about our industry and our state organization. I am also happy to report that Maryland was well represented at NCDA:

We were recognized:

Janet Wall, Merit Award

We presented:

Karen Chopra

Marilyn Maze

Janet Wall

We were students:

Lakeisha Mathews, Leadership Academy (2011 – 2012)

We taught:

Janet Wall, Tech Cafe

We participated:

Michelle Carroll, Maryland flag rep. in opening ceremony

We enjoyed the conference:

Pamela Allen

Monique Dula

Elda Swartz

Jose Torres-Reyes

Niel Carey

Ellen Blumner

Vicki Sawyer

Sue Gordon

Moreover, as officers of MCDA we attended state training sessions and learned we have one of the strongest career development associations (CDAs) in the nation. In fact, some states do not have a CDA at all and if they do, they struggle to maintain a strong membership base. However, we can be proud that MCDA stands tall among the CDAs, with a solid membership base, website, strong board and accomplished members.

As members you can be proud to be a part of a great state and great organization. I hope that you are also in attendance at next year's conference in Atlanta, GA where the theme will be *Celebrating My Career Dreams*. We also hope to see you at our own state conference being held on January 27, 2012 at the Crowne Plaza Baltimore in Timonium, MD. In the meantime, as your President, I am committed to helping MCDA remain a great organization that lives up to it's mission:

Promoting awareness of the need for lifelong career development by increasing public knowledge of career issues and services and by supporting the development of career professionals.

I am happy to be working with a team of committed officers, chair persons and volunteers to serve you over the next year. You can learn more about them on our website at www.mdcareer.org. I thank you for choosing to be a member of MCDA and hope you will make this the year you get involved. Do not hesitate to contact me with your ideas, concerns or questions at MCDA.President@MDcareers.org. I look forward to seeing you in January at our annual conference.

Warmest Regards, **Lakeisha M. Mathews**, GCDF, CPRW, CPCC



Members on the Move

Lynne Waymon keynoted at the Corning, Inc. Procurement and Transportation Conference in Corning, New York. The meeting drew 230 employees from all over the world. Lynne spoke on how mastering the 8 Networking Competencies leads to personal, team, and organizational success. Contact her at LWaymon@ContactsCount.com.

IAWP (MD Chapter) President **Denise Carey** reports that the chapter received several awards at the recent conference. In addition to these awards, the Maryland Chapter and its membership Chair, Grace Fendlay, received seven membership awards for recruiting and retaining members. Contact her at dcarey@dllr.state.md.us.

De Jackson, GDCF has completed her DCF this month. She has also developed 10 audio training clips for the SSA internal website, called Career *SOUNDS* of Success. These are off shoots of SSA workshops entitled Career *SECRETS* of Success. In addition, she has provided two audios for the SSA work/life website under title: Parents Sound Off. The format is that of a radio talk show. Each segment is short, edutaining, and under 10 minutes. Alternate formats are available for employees with disabilities. The training is available

to 65,000+ employees nationwide. Contact her at de.jackson@ssa.gov

Charles Endicott reports that as the fall semester approaches, so does on-campus recruiting, job fairs, workshops and many more activities in career services offices throughout Maryland. There will be an activity that is much different and new at Salisbury University (SU) this year. Video interviewing will be attempted at SU and everyone is very excited about the 18 plus employers who have signed up to interview SU students about possible careers with their companies. SU career services will have workshops to train the students on video interviewing and the new project will be heavily advertised. Contact Charles at rcendicott@salisbury.edu.

Laura M. Labovich, of Aspire! Empower! Career Strategy Group, is speaking at the National Resume Writers Association (NRWA) conference in Portland, Maine in September on the topic of How to Make Your Contacts Count. In addition, Gazette.net, Maryland Community News Online, will feature her Ask Laura! Career Column on an ongoing basis. Contact her at lauramichelle@gmail.com.

Paula Brand wants to share that the Career Center at Arnold Station had a very successful year since opening in March 2010. Because of high traffic and demand, it has moved to a bigger office (from Suite 205 to 207) within the Arnold Station Shopping Center and it continues to operate the training room in Suite 109. Thanks for all who have supported our efforts. Contact Paula at paulabrandcprw@gmail.com.

Janet Wall received her Master Career Development Professional (MCDP) certification from NCDA. She is keynoting the University of Maryland Advisor's Conference in August. Contact her at sagesolutions@janetwall.net.

It's Crunch Time...

At a time when our economic growth continues its lethargic pace, unemployment remains at a high level, and uncertainty and anxiety exists in abundance, many of our professional colleagues in public settings and in private practice must deal with reduced budgets and resources at the very time when their services are needed most and are in greatest demand.

The media is saturated with less than encouraging indicators: an economy that often seems on the verge of further recession; lingering high unemployment, especially for younger and older job seekers; families stressed by one or both parents seeking employment or struggling with one or more low paying or part time jobs, and being forced to balance work and family responsibilities; and students faced with the increasing cost of technical or higher education along with uncertainty of employment following graduation.

Fortunately as professionals trained and experienced in the career field, we are aware that ups, downs and cycles are characteristic of the economy, of education and oftentimes life itself. Still, at this particular time it may be especially important to remind ourselves of some of the factors that may help us cope and perhaps even thrive during these uncertain and challenging times.

First and foremost, it is important to remember that in times like these, our clients and those we serve look to us more than ever for professional counsel, service, and assistance.

Second, it is especially important to strengthen our procedures for gathering and disseminating data and evidence of the effectiveness of our services, and to use that data to increase our support systems and to make future plans.

Third, we need to give high priority to professional development and continuing education, especially in areas related to current issues.

Fourth, we must seek new and additional sources of support. For example, community service groups such as Kiwanas, Lions, Optimists, and Ruritanas may be interested in learning about the services you provide, and willing to consider means of providing financial or other support for your services. If you are in a school or school system, parent groups need to be informed regularly of the services you provide and their effectiveness, and they should be encouraged to provide support for those services.

Finally, this is a time to add to and strengthen your networks. Certainly your state and professional associations, including MCDA and NCDA should be at the top of the list, because they provide the communications, research, professional training, and especially contacts with professional colleagues that are of vital importance to professional practice.

Speaking of professional colleagues, we are so fortunate in Maryland to continue to benefit from highly competent and dynamic leaders including Lee Richmond, Marilyn Maze, Michelle Carroll, JoAnn Bowsbey, Diana Bailey, and many others. Janet Wall's recognition and receipt of NCDA's Merit Award at the NCDA national conference in San Antonio recently was another example of the excellent leadership that we are fortunate to have in Maryland and nationally.

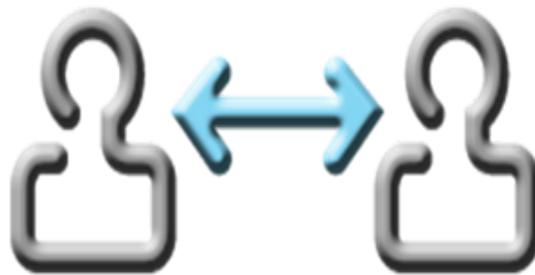
Submitted by **Niel Carey**. Contact him at Enielcarey@aol.com.

Editor's note: Niel Carey was a counselor and department head with Baltimore County Public Schools, Supervisor of Career Guidance and Career Education Coordinator with the MD Department of Education, and the first executive director of NCDA.

SAVE THE DATE

!!!!!!

Connecting the Dots: Careers, Clients & Corporations



Developing Creativity & Competence to Serve Constituents

Annual MCDA Conference

JANUARY 27, 2012 ♦ CROWNE PLAZA BALTIMORE

Featuring:

Adrienne Alberts

Manager of College Relations and
Diversity at Constellation Energy

Deb Osborn

President, National Career
Development Association

Find registration and conference details at www.mdcareers.org

Summer Professional Development Opportunities

Use your summer downtime to invest in your professional development! Here are some online, self-paced courses that can be taken from any location with Internet access. Use these options for maintaining your certification. The online courses have been pre-approved by the Center for Credentialing and Education for GCDF re-certification. GCDF's can register at <http://www.janetwall.net/courses-workshops.php>. Others can register at <http://www.mdcareers.org>.

1. **Hidden Gems.** In this program you will use 29 interactive web tools that will help you enhance the career development of your students, clients, and customers. Self-paced, 12 clock hours.
2. **Occupational Information for Career Advisors.** This course uses videos that will show you many ways you can use O*NET to help persons find a compatible occupation, make a career transition, find information to craft resumes, and learn about related occupations. Self-paced, 3.5 clock hours.
3. **Working in the Green Economy.** This is a new offering that will give you the latest information on green occupations and jobs. This video-based course will show you how the emphasis on green is affecting the world of work, what government information is currently available on the green economy, and how to track green jobs. Download several important resources to help you better understand green jobs and how to find them. Self-paced, 5 clock hours.
4. **Career Development Facilitator Program.** The 8th MCDA CDF program will start in October. Be sure to start working on incorporating this into your training plan. Successful completion of this 120+ course provides you the opportunity to apply for the Global Career Development Facilitator certification, an internationally recognized and portable certification. More details can be found at <http://sites.google.com/site/cdfprogram>. Registration will be open in August.

Contact careerfacilitator@janetwall.net for more information.

Career Development Facilitator Training Advanced Planning Information for Teaching Professionals

Maryland Career Development Association's Career Development Facilitator Program is now approved for 3 Professional Development Credits by the Maryland State Department of Education. Successful completion of the program can lead to the prestigious Global Career Development Facilitator certification through the Center for Credentialing in Education.

Who Is Eligible: Any Maryland educator with a valid Maryland teaching certificate (9-12).

Restrictions: If program is on a workday, no stipend can be offered; if program is on a Saturday, the school district may pay a stipend.

Tuition: \$1350 payable to the Maryland Career Development Association
<http://www.mdcareers.org> ---> Professional Development tab

Instructors: Dr. Janet Wall and Ms. Karol Taylor, NCDCA/CDF--certified instructors

Process: Potential participants should contact your district's Continuing Professional Development Coordinator/MSDE Liaison using the MSDE # 10-16-02

For general information about the program visit <http://sites.google.com/site/cdfprogram>.
Next program will start in October, 2011.

Going from "If it Bleeds, It Leads" to "If They Lead, They Succeed"

It is a known fact that a person's negative attributes over his or her positive attributes are most noticeable. An individual could be a positive role model for his family, church, community, and in the workplace. Moreover, this individual maybe well respected and considered a top leader. This person rarely gets recognized for his or her positive contributions. However, if this same individual gets pulled over and is issued a speeding ticket, the negative event is then publicized by the media.

What happens next? You guessed it. As soon as this story breaks, it would appear that this positive person's positive reputation is tarnished. Why? The media spends most of its time publishing negative stories which appear to capture the attention of the mass public. The media's motto is "If it bleeds, it leads."

Given the media's apparent lack of attention to the positive, it is more important for organization leaders to change how they recognize people, particularly those in volunteer organizations.

Within a month or two, the Maryland's Career Development Association (MCDA) will be accepting nominations to recognize members who they feel have gone above and beyond their scope of duty to achieve organization goals. Some attributes to look for include:

- Leadership
- Team work
- Dedication
- Going above and beyond the call of duty

When people are recognized and praised for their efforts, it adds more energy and motivation to their dedication and drive to contribute even more to the organization because they feel appreciated. Please look forward to the next announcement from the awards committee, which would include the nomination forms. I hope you will take the time to nominate a person you feel has made a great contribution to MCDA.

Submitted by: **Raymond Holmes**, (c), GCDF, Chair – Awards Committee

Interviewing-Another Perspective

Recently an opening in my department provided me with the opportunity to add a new member to our Retention Department team. This would be my first opportunity, since completing the CDF program last year, to review, select and interview a potential new hire for my department. It was important for me to document the process and share it with my colleagues at MCDA.

As CDF's, and career development professionals, we strive to prepare our clients for the tough job market interview. We tell our clients that getting an interview is difficult and it is their one chance to shine. With that in mind, all aspects of the job search need to be refined from the development of the resume and cover letter to the selection of attire, personal appearance, and even body language. No detail is trivial, not in this job market.

From the outset, I expected to receive sharp, targeted resumes and short, concise cover letters. Instead, I received poorly written, rambling resumes with objectives, misspelled words, incomplete sentences, abbreviations, and email addresses that were inappropriate. Most resumes did not list any technical skills. HR weeded out the worst ones and forwarded those that were acceptable. I chose three qualified candidates.

On the day of the interviews, I expected the candidates to be dressed appropriately. If they did any research on Peirce College, they would know that we are a conservative institution. If the candidate passed this mile marker, would they be aptly prepared to answer complex questions, expound on the challenges facing the college, and dazzle me with innovative ways to reach our measurable goals? My hope was that they had read our web-based strategic initiative, or at least the college's mission statement.

Unfortunately, that was just my interview fantasy. In reality, none of the three candidates was wearing proper interview attire. One candidate had bright yellow nail polish and facial piercings. She was absolutely qualified for the position and before I began the interview, mentally, she was eliminated. The CDF in me wanted to pull her aside and say, "What were you thinking"? One candidate responded that she wanted the position because it was a closer commute. Two of the three were actually interviewing me. Yes, you read correctly, they each had a list of questions for me. It was quite obvious from their posture and large open pad folio that my organization was being evaluated. Perhaps, it is a generational thing, or the fact that two of the three candidates were employed, that it made them less likely to understand interviewing etiquette. Sadly, it was anathema for the interviewees. My years of hiring experience and CDF training would rank interviewing the interviewer as a critical mistake. It was back to the drawing board.

Last week, I interviewed a candidate that had all the right moves. She was dressed appropriately, and she brought forth incredible insight on achieving our departmental and organizational goals. She had only one question, which was quite good. If I am ever out in the job market, I am going to use it. Are you curious? You can email me for the question.

Submitted by Eileen Snyder at esnyder@peirce.edu.



Set Yourself Apart from the Rest

New Career Development Facilitator Program Starts in October

120+ Hour Professional Development Opportunity

Career Development Competencies addressed by the NCDA CDF Curriculum:

1. **Helping Skills** - Be proficient in the basic career facilitating process while including productive interpersonal relationships.
2. **Labor Market Information and Resources** - Understand labor market and occupational information and trends. Be able to use current resources.
3. **Assessment** - Comprehend and use (*under supervision*) both formal and informal career development assessments with emphasis on relating appropriate ones to the population served.
4. **Diverse Populations** - Recognize special needs of various groups and adapt services to meet their needs.
5. **Ethical and Legal Issues** - Follow the CDF code of ethics and know current legislative regulations.
6. **Career Development Models** - Understand career development theories, models, and techniques as they apply to lifelong development, gender, age, and ethnic background.
7. **Employability Skills** - Know job search strategies and placement techniques, especially in working with specific groups.
8. **Training Clients and Peers** - Prepare and develop materials for training programs and presentations.
9. **Program Management/Implementation** - Understand career development programs and their implementation, and work as a liaison in collaborative relationships.
10. **Promotion and Public Relations** - Market and promote career development programs with staff and supervisors.
11. **Technology** - Comprehend and use career development computer applications.
12. **Consultation** - Accept suggestions for performance improvement from consultants or supervisors.

**LEARN MORE AT <http://sites.google.com/site/cdfprogram>
Registration is now open at <http://www.mdcareers.org>.**

Book Review: Networking for the Novice, Nervous or Naïve Job Seeker by Tom Dezell

Tom is one of Maryland's own workforce development experts and currently works at Maryland's Professional Outplacement Assistance Center POAC Office (www.dlir.md.us/poac). I found this book very useful, especially when working with people who are hesitant to network, and I have recommended it to many job seekers. Maybe after reading this review, you will be compelled to check out the book for yourself?

This book hits all of the critical points about networking for job acquisition in a straightforward manner and gives real-life examples of success. Tom has a strong background in helping people get back to work and is a knowledgeable source of information, based on his many years in workforce development. His breadth of experience extends from people leaving incarceration to executive level professionals. However, he accurately points out that at *any* level of job search, networking is a must!

The most important points he makes are: why you should not fear networking, how to overcome that fear, and how crucial networking is to a successful job search. He also emphasizes what all workforce development staff and career counselors already know: you can't do it on your own! Being the stoic "Rugged Individualist Job Seeker" will not get you very far in your job search.

One of the main themes throughout the book is to be patient. Don't stop reaching out to someone because you don't see instant results. Most people these days are extremely busy balancing life and work and may not be able to get back with you right away. Do not take this personally or assume they do not want to help. Expect it to take more than one attempt. At the very least, make multiple attempts to contact someone or offer help before giving up. Remember that "improving your network is a marathon not a sprint."

In addition, Tom shares specific tips on networking tactics. While reading the book, there were six points that resonated with me the most. They were:

- 1) Many people have experienced layoff and dismissal. Believe that people who have experienced job loss will be empathetic to your networking efforts because they have been there before. In fact, one survey referenced by columnist Joan Lloyd, stated that sixty percent of CEOs reported that they had been fired at last once in their career. Bottom line: Don't assume people will not understand what you are going through.
- 2) Networking can help garner valuable information that may decrease the chances of taking a job that is a bad fit or with a company that is secretly failing financially.
- 3) As with any job search activity, follow up is critical. Don't make networking a one-time event and keep in touch with established contacts regularly. The author suggests making a minimum of four attempts per year to make contact with someone in your network.
- 4) Attend events conducive to meeting new people in your area of job search. Before going, research who will be attending. If needed, bring a friend to ease your discomfort. Once there, introduce yourself to others. No one benefits if you stand alone in the corner. Try to keep conversations brief and do not monopolize conversations.
- 5) Ask for informational interviews to learn more about companies and occupations. This is a great way to network and learn at the same time.
- 6) When making contact with others, job seekers need to heed some wise advice of sales professions. Focus on your product's benefits and features. (Remember that you are the product in your job search so don't give up easily and use the SPR method (Script, Practice and Rehearse) when making pitches.

In summary, whether addressing what to do when attending a networking event, how to handle cold calls, deciding who to contact or how to get beyond gatekeepers and human resource staff, Tom gives concrete advice that can be put to use immediately. Chapter Seven is entirely devoted to sharing twelve concrete steps to improve your job networking but every chapter offers valuable nuggets of information. If you read this book and implement its advice, you should be landing a job in no time.

*Submitted by **Paula Brand**, GCDF, CPRW. Paula is a Career Advisor for the Career Center at Arnold Station (which is part of the Anne Arundel County One Stop System). She is the Secretary for MCDA. Contact*

A Few Tips on Effectively Using Social Media

Networks are our professional life-line. As our time gets tighter and tighter, social media can truly assist in professional networking. Here are a few tips.

1. Linking your social media channels leads to more efficient use of social media.

Example: Linked In> Twitter>Facebook [FB]

Link your Linked In account to your Twitter feed and your Twitter feed to your FB account. Posting updates to your LinkedIn profile will then send the same information [140 characters or less] via a Tweet to your Twitter feed. If your FB account is linked to your Twitter feed, your FB status will be updated as well.

For many people each type of social media has a slightly different audience. Linking social media hits various networking circles at one time.

[On Linked In the link to connect Twitter and Linked In is a small box just below the status dialogue box. To link your Twitter and FB accounts, from your settings in Twitter select Applications, violá!]

2. The most effective time to use Twitter and Facebook professionally is in the morning, 8- 10 am.

People log onto their various social media sites in the morning as they arrive at work and get set-up for the day. Checking-in online is part of people's daily routine. The morning has the highest volume of traffic for "real news".

An advantage of posting early in the day is that those in your professional network will 'retweet' or push your posts out to their networks, thus, the beauty of social networking.

3. The next most effective time to use Twitter and Facebook professionally is in the evening between 8-10pm.

Dinner is finished, the kids are on their way to bed and many people catch their breath by checking in on their social media to see what's happening/what they missed.

4. Social media works best when it is personalized.

Below are boilerplate posts and relevant links for FB and Twitter, please personalize for your networks and push it out.

©Jan Baum 2011, all rights reserved; reprinted with permission

Towson University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA, Director: Object Lab, a digital fabrication lab, Program Director: Interdisciplinary Object Design, Twitter: Jangrrrl, <http://www.linkedin.com/in/janxbaum>; <http://janbaum.net>; <http://theobjectlab.com>



Social Screening of Job Candidates: Focusing on the Facts

There have been dozens of news stories and blog posts about the Federal Trade Commission's recent decision regarding a company called Social Intelligence and the practice of pre-employment screening of job applicants based on their digital activity. Many of these pieces are misleading, and most of them are misunderstood. This post strives to correct errors of both omission and commission and promotes a fuller understanding of this important Digital Era practice.

I first wrote about the topic of social screening last fall, in a white paper entitled "[Social Screening: Candidates – and](#)

[Employers – Beware.](#)” The paper was inspired in part by Social Intelligence and a couple similar start-ups I learned about at the HR Technology Conference. If you’re not familiar with the practice of social screening, the white paper will help put this post in context and will further enhance your ability to draw informed conclusions about its implications for both candidates and employers. I encourage you to read it first.

DID YOU HEAR...?

Have you heard that a company called Social Intelligence (SI) has received approval from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to dig into *all* your Facebook activity for last seven years to find dirt on you on behalf of a prospective employer? Or that SI is creating a database they can dip into whenever you apply for a job to look for past indiscretions? Or that employers are hiring SI to find reasons to reject candidates for all kinds of legally-indefensible and morally questionable reasons?

Yeah, it’s not true. None of it.

If you do a quick search on “federal trade commission social intelligence,” you’ll find dozens of news stories and blog posts published over the last couple of months, most of which stem from a letter the FTC wrote in May regarding their investigation of SI. Many of these pieces have dramatic headlines that may entice readers but do very little to inform or educate them. In fact, the headlines are often misleading, which – combined with poor and/or incomplete reporting of the facts and their implications – tends to promote fear mongering and rabble rousing rather than thoughtful reflection and discourse.

Here are five pieces that came across my desk in the past month, in the order in which I received them:

- [How Embarrassing/Job-Threatening Facebook Photos Are Part Of Your Job Application](#) (Forbes)
- [Social Intelligence Corporation Can Keep Your Social Trail for 7 Years](#) (Social Media Today)
- [Background Check Companies Scrutinize Your Online Presence](#) (Tech Republic)
- [Social Media History Becomes a New Job Hurdle](#) (New York Times)
- [Your Employer Knows Everything](#) (The Chronicle of Higher Education)

The accuracy of these pieces varies widely. The NYT article was well researched and is the most factual/least sensationalistic. The Forbes post was initially full of inaccuracies, but I give Kashmir Hill credit for going back and setting the record straight. The Chronicle post is the most egregiously wrong.

Errors and misrepresentations in pieces like these is more than a little bit disturbing, especially given that they’re in widely read and generally respected and trusted media outlets. On the presumption that the publishers have high content curation and/or editorial standards, most readers assume the writers have done their due diligence and take their words at face value. When those words – either through omission or commission – convey false impressions, the result is emotional, knee-jerk reactions, exaggerations, and the spread of misinformation that further fans the flames of hysteria.

Call me old fashioned, but I believe we should focus on facts and have reasoned discussions about important topics that have serious implications for both individuals and organizations. I don’t see much value in being provocative simply for the sake of provocation. And perhaps I’m naïve, but I’d like to think that bloggers and other thought leaders can hold themselves to higher standards and avoid tabloid journalism. If your goal is to initiate a public dialogue, I think you have a responsibility to make sure you lay a truthful and accurate foundation for that dialogue.

But perhaps I digress. Getting back to the topic at hand...

FOCUSING ON THE FACTS

Here is a summary of the key facts and their implications with respect to SI and the recent FTC decision. This summary is derived from my own knowledge of pre-employment background screening and the [Fair Credit Reporting Act \(FCRA\)](#), the [FTC’s letter explaining their decision](#), and [Social Intelligence’s website](#). I also exchanged emails with Geoff Andrews, the COO of Social Intelligence, to get clarification on a fact presented in the NYT piece I wasn’t sure about. Some of these facts are accurately stated in various articles/posts, but they seem to get lost in the presentation and ensuing discussion. Others, though critical to a complete understanding, have generally been omitted.

As noted above, I've written a white paper entitled "[Social Screening: Candidates – and Employers – Beware](#)," which provides additional information and recommendations for both individuals and organizations. I've also written several related blog posts about the relative rights and responsibilities of individuals and employers.

Understanding the Risks

FACT 1: The practice of social screening is not new, and it's certainly not limited to companies like Social Intelligence. There are many studies indicating that employers and third-party recruiters have been "googling" candidates and checking out their digital activity for years.

FACT 2: The risks to individuals based on their digital identities and activities exist regardless of whether employers and companies like SI engage in social screening. Information about us is shared publicly in cyberspace all the time – both by ourselves and others. It is incumbent upon all of us to monitor our digital identities and take appropriate action to manage them (e.g., fixing our privacy settings, using strong passwords, deleting inappropriate content, abiding by the rules of civility).

FACT 3: For most job candidates, social screening is generally a later-stage activity, depending on the recruitment processes used. Because it is resource intensive, it usually occurs when the pool of candidates has been narrowed down significantly, and often just prior to an offer. By that point the candidates have already been screened on traditional criteria (e.g., skills, experience, cultural fit) and employers are focused on identifying factors that can create significant risks for them (e.g., engaging in illegal activity, disclosing confidential information). Minor indiscretions and lapses in judgment are unlikely to impact an offer decision.

Understanding the FCRA and the FTC's Decision

FACT 4: With respect to pre-employment background checks, the FCRA only applies to companies who are hired to conduct these checks on behalf of employers. It does not apply to employers who do their own screening or (as far as I know) third-party recruiters.

FACT 5: There was no FTC "ruling," and it hasn't "approved" Social Intelligence or given it "permission" to do certain things. Although Social Intelligence has always declared itself to be in compliance with the FCRA, the FTC decided to launch an investigation to determine whether that was indeed the case. [In the letter](#) discussing the conclusion of their investigation, the FTC

- Indicated that SI does meet the definition of a "consumer reporting agency" and is therefore subject to the FCRA;
- Asserted that they found no evidence that SI was noncompliant with the FCRA; and
- Concluded that "no further action is warranted at this time" while reserving "the right to take further action as the public interest may require."

Nothing in the letter should be construed as an endorsement or approval.

FACT 6: The FTC's decision only relates to Social Intelligence's pre-employment screening activities, not its employee monitoring activities (which are likely not subject to the FCRA).

FACT 7: Here are the main compliance elements of the FCRA from a hiring perspective (click [here](#) for a fuller explication, or read the [statute itself](#)):

- Job candidates must formally agree (i.e., in writing) to a background check in advance.
- If any negative information is found, the third party must undertake steps to ensure its accuracy.
- If an employer intends to take an adverse action against a candidate based on negative information that's been discovered, it must provide the candidate with a copy of the third-party's report, along with a statement of his/her FCRA rights, and allow the candidate to respond and/or dispute the decision.
- Any information that is determined to be false after the fact must be deleted from the search records and the report.

What does this mean for candidates?

- They're given fair warning that a prospective employer is going to conduct a digital search, which gives them

plenty of opportunity to conduct their own digital searches for publicly-available information to see what information/activity might be attached to them.

- If the official search produces negative information that they believe is false or misleading, they have the right and the opportunity to address those findings. There's also a well-defined dispute resolution process they can follow if an employer decides to take an adverse action that they believe to be unfair.

Understanding Social Intelligence (and similar companies that are FCRA compliant)

FACT 8: Social Intelligence's searches are not indiscriminate, unfocused, and exhaustive; rather, they are specifically focused on criteria defined in advance by an employer, based on job-relevant and legally-defensible factors (click [here](#) for details):

- SI only searches for PUBLICLY available information. They do not access information that is private (e.g., password protected and/or not generally available on the internet).
- Information that doesn't correspond with the pre-defined criteria are removed from the search results, as is information that is legally protected at both the federal (e.g., gender, age, religion) and state (e.g., sexual orientation) levels.
- Although initial sweeps are automated, negative results are carefully screened by human beings and verified to ensure their accuracy before being included in a report.
- In conducting their searches, SI can only go back 7 years, per the FCRA. Any information they find that's older than 7 years is not included in their results.

FACT 9: SI does not create a database of results that can be accessed for future searches. Each social screen is conducted independently, based on a specific employer's criteria. To comply with the FCRA, SI does keep search results for 7 years, in case of disputes and/or legal action, but that data is not available for any other purpose.

FACT 10: Though it's easy to vilify companies like SI, the risks for both individuals and employers may be much greater when social screenings are not conducted by an FCRA-regulated third party. When employers conduct background checks on their own, there are likely to be fewer checks and balances and a much greater risk of discrimination using legally-indefensible criteria and inaccurate/unverified information. Background screening companies offer disciplined, systematic processes that insulate employers and produce relevant, verified results. In addition, from the candidate's perspective, the process is transparent, with built-in accountability and the ability to address negative results.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of how some individuals feel about it, the practice of social screening is more likely to increase than decline. FCRA-compliant companies like SI may not offer perfect solutions, but they are a viable option for managing pre-hire employment risks, and may even provide more legally-defensible approaches that better balance the interests of both candidates and employers than employers conducting these checks on their own.

But we're still in the early days of the Digital Era, and we're still determining the proper balance between the rights and responsibilities of employers and individuals. It's incumbent upon all of us to evaluate the ramifications of digital technologies in reasoned and reasonable ways to determine where the lines should be drawn and the best ways to move forward.

Written by **Courtney Shelton Hunt**, PhD, Founder, Social Media in Organizations (SMinOrgs) Community Principal, Renaissance Strategic Solutions (RSS); Reprinted with permission.