CONSUMER NEWS

SAN DIEGO CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Using Online Employment Resources Safely & Securely

Part 1 of a 2 part series on Safe Job Searches

By providing an online hub where employers can draw from a large pool of talent, job search websites provide useful resources for employers and job seekers alike. These sites have many advantages. First of all, they're free for the job seeker. Moreover, anyone can post a job listing. However, this lack of restrictions cuts both ways. On one hand, it ensures postings from a wide range of legitimate businesses. On the other, it opens the door to con artists, fraud and abuse. The key to success is staying safe while navigating the online jungle. Following these three simple rules to online job searching will help you achieve that goal.

RULE #1: PROTECT YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION

According to the National Institute of Standards & Technology, a division of the U.S. Commerce Department, there are two categories of personal information. The first category contains information that can be used to identify a specific individual. This group includes your name, social security number, date and place of birth, and mother's maiden name. The second category includes any additional information that is connected to a specific individual. This group includes medical, educational, financial, and employment information.

Generally, an employer will only ask for this sort of information in the final stages of hiring. These final stages are almost always conducted in person, or occasionally over the phone. Thus, never send your personal information over email, and do not provide bank account information to set up direct deposit until after you're officially hired. If someone claiming to be a prospective employer asks for this kind of information over email, your guard should go up immediately. If you do receive such a request, notify the website's administrator so they know to remove the potentially fraudulent posting from the site.

It is also important to remember that your resume contains important personal information such as your name, address, phone number, email, and employment history. Therefore, do not email resumes to prospective employers indiscriminately. Rather, verify that a company is legitimate before sending them your resume. This essential step is the subject of our next rule.

RULE #2: RESEARCH THE COMPANY

One of the fastest ways to tell if a company is legitimate or not is to check the website contained within the potential employer's email address. To do this, simply copy the text following the "@" symbol

in the potential employer's email address, and paste it into your web browser. If you get a message saying that their website cannot be found, be very suspicious. In 2013, virtually any legitimate company will have a website. If the potential employer is using a free email service, like yahoo, hotmail, or gmail, proceed with extreme caution. Most legitimate employers will use an email address specific to their company, rather than a free, web-based email service.

Another way to verify a potential employer's credibility is to look for a phone number. Most legitimate employers will have a direct line or customer service number listed in their job posting, or on their website. If they do not, that should raise a red flag. Once you find the phone number, call and ask the operator for more information to ensure that the business is legitimate.

Finally, check out the prospective employer with the Better Business Bureau. The BBB allows you to determine a business's legitimacy by obtaining a "Reliability Report" right from their website. Using an online search engine to investigate the prospective employer is also a quick and easy way to find out more information about the company or individuals involved in the business. Common job posting scams are often discussed on Internet message boards and

consumer review websites. Therefore, using these resources also allows you to find out what consumers are saying about the company.

RULE #3: AVOID UPFRONT FEES

Some job postings advertise opportunities requiring a fee to cover training, background checks or other employment related expenses. These are usually a scam. Therefore, research the company and ask for an accounting of where the fee goes. If they can't provide documentation, it's probably a scam. According the BBB, "no legitimate job offer will require out of pocket expenses from a potential employee for background checks, credit reports, or administrative fees before an interview."

CONCLUSION

Online job search websites are an excellent resource for job creators and job seekers alike. However, the fact that anyone can post a listing on these sites opens the door for fraud and abuse. Therefore, job hunters must be vigilant when they are searching for jobs online. By protecting your personal information, researching the prospective employer and avoiding upfront fees, you'll be able to navigate the online job search jungle safely and securely. Stay tuned for next month, when we'll continue our discussion by taking a look at some specific online job scams common to the San Diego area.

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The information provided in this newsletter is intended to convey general information and is not intended to be relied upon as legal advice.

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The San Diego City Attorney's Consumer & Environmental Protection Unit prosecutes criminal and civil violations of California's unfair competition and other consumer laws committed in the City of San Diego. The Unit maintains a Phone Hotline for consumers to report possible violations. You can reach the Hotline at **(619) 533-5600.**