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## Hard job to spot recruits' fake CVs

### **Better check-ups are needed to deter people who lie about their work history**



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People are prepared to go to a lot of effort to get a job, particularly at a time like this when positions are scarce and a rash of redundancies mean that qualified candidates have swamped the market. Expensive paper for the CV, a new suit, perhaps even a session or two with a career coach before the interview are often used to make sure it all goes well.

Or, if that seems like too much work, creating a fictional work history complete with an imaginary master's degree and glowing reference written by a friend using a fake name.

"One of the best cases I heard was a woman who invented an entire company just so that she could say she worked there," said Eyal Ben-

Cohen, managing director of Verifile, a pre-employment screening company.

The woman built a website for the supposed business but was caught out when Verifile's checks showed that it had been put online only a couple of days after she had been asked for more information about her former employer. Other suspicions had been raised when they rang the telephone number given for the business and the person they spoke to in the personnel department sounded very much like the person who answered the initial call, putting on a funny voice.

Most CV cheating, however, is less complicated exaggeration, such as upgrading a degree from a 2:2 to a 2:1 or overstating a former salary. Some candidates are also inflating their professional responsibilities by taking advantage of many companies' unwillingness to provide references that give anything more than dates of employment

and a job title, said David Lawton, the UK country manager at Cubiks, a personnel consultancy.

Quite often misrepresentation takes place by implication rather than outright statement, for example by listing a course under “training” rather than “work experience”, said Tom Fahey, owner of First Point, an IT recruitment agency. “That’s still dishonesty,” he said. “You have to do a lot of work decoding CVs.”

This means careful interviewing to tease out the facts, as well as basic checks on salary, qualifications and so forth. Lawton said: “A lot of organisations are very lax on pre and post-offer checks. It’s perfectly possible to ask for documentary evidence of salary and so forth.” This can in turn be cross-checked against data from other assessment tools and then used to frame pointed questions for the interview.

After all, not all documentary evidence is trustworthy. Online “universities” that sell degrees for a few hundred pounds usually include legitimate-looking diplomas and a telephone verification service where someone will confirm that the candidate does indeed have a degree from them, said Ben-Cohen. And candidates can use stolen letterheads or willing accomplices to provide written or verbal references. “Seeing a certificate or ringing up is not enough,” he said.

In many cases, recruiters should also go beyond checking biographical information, he added. Criminal-record checks are compulsory for some positions and useful for others, while a credit check will flag up whether someone being considered for a financially influential role at work has problems managing money at home.

Even driving licences should be checked if someone will be driving for work. The corporate manslaughter act means that company directors could end up in jail if, say, a support engineer without a driving licence killed a child while on his way to a call.

Keith Dugdale, director of global recruitment at KPMG, said simply making it clear at the outset that CVs would be checked helped to reduce the number of people who misrepresent themselves.

“We put it up front in neon lights that we will do checks and that dishonesty will not be tolerated,” he said. The firm still comes across candidates who claim a 2:1 in their initial application, then come clean when they get an interview, but as soon as the lie is uncovered — even if the applicants bring it up themselves — any offer is rescinded and they are out the door. “We made it clear upfront that we expect absolute honesty,” said Dugdale.

Alex Charles, one of the founders of iProfile, an online CV site, hopes that in the future candidates could take responsibility for managing the verification of their own achievements. At the moment, employers who check CVs do it themselves or pay specialist bureaux that charge about £60 for even the most basic check. These checks need to be undertaken by each employer, regardless of how many times they have been done in the past.

In future, however, the results of such checks could be formally linked to a candidate’s online CV so that recruiters would not have to redo the same searches.

“We can see an opportunity for candidates to take responsibility for that information,” said Charles. “Then recruiters could prioritise their searches to look for people who have been pre-checked.”

He acknowledges that some sort of central authority would be required to ensure that all parties trust the system, and that there are still questions to be answered about who would pay, but said that benefits such as speeding up the recruitment process and reducing costs could be significant.