

Putting faith in background checks

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Extensive reputational damage can be severe for any business. However, it is often forgotten that it is not only industry that can suffer from a hit to its public standing, but community and faith-based organisations as well.

When it comes to the pre-screening process, businesses are often very selective when it comes to the individuals that owners allow into the fold. This is because these individuals form long-term relationships that reflect on the business. Similarly, religious and community leaders play an important role in the lives of those they serve. Their position of authority fosters trust which often leads to officials taking on a rather familial role of counsellor and confidant, according to Rudi Kruger, General Manager of Data Services at LexisNexis.

“This close-knit relationship makes conducting pre-screening checks on new employees an essential requirement,” said Kruger. “When you take into consideration the one-on-one and overall influence faith-based and community workers hold, it makes sense to ensure that organisations cover all bases in the hiring phase. As in business, it is dangerous to operate under assumptions and good faith alone. Precautions must be considered to protect both the institution’s reputation and its community members,” said Kruger.

“We live in a society where social media aids in the mass dissemination of news – negative or positive – with lightning speed. This also means that nothing is ever truly lost in the ether due to the existence of the Internet. Therefore, reputational damage has longevity and is difficult to shake.”

Another key consideration for faith-based and community-run organisations, is the protection of their capital. “Frequently, large percentages of the funds used to keep these types of institutions operational are donated by the community in which they function. Mismanagement of these funds can lead to a breakdown in trust and, in some cases, even closure,” said Kruger.

Earlier this month the KZN Blind and Deaf Society revealed an alleged theft of R12 million from its bank accounts by a senior staff member. Similarly last year, an American-based charity which cares for around 2,000 people by providing food, and shelter for homeless families, uncovered fraud amounting to \$108,000 in the space of 18 months. The culprit was the organisation’s chief operating officer.

“Fraud within smaller community organisations is not uncommon. It often occurs because there is more room to conceal underhand behaviour, especially if there are volunteers involved who are giving of their spare time and not able to monitor goings-on as thoroughly as they would their full-time jobs. The simple truth is, no community institution can afford the risk that comes with not performing background checks. As with business, the potential risk far outweighs the added cost and steps in the hiring process.”

With the assistance of Lexis® RefCheck, a background screening tool from LexisNexis Data Services, community organisations can be equipped when it is time to appoint the leaders. Lexis® RefCheck services include verification of tertiary and secondary academic qualifications held by the individual from registered local and international institutions; identity and South African citizenship validation; fraud history checks via the South African Fraud Prevention Services; credit history checks through detailed TransUnion and Experian credit bureau reports; criminal history check via AFISwitch (electronic fingerprint collection and processing); verification of local and international employment history and professional association membership; and matching of bank account against an identity number or registration number.

For more information, visit: <http://www.lexisnexis.co.za/our-solutions/private-sector/risk-management/refcheck.aspx>.

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