

Preventing problems

A Rancho Santa Margarita business provides background checks on prospective employees.

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STAFF WRITER

Tom Lawson's life would be much easier if people would just tell the truth.

A pioneer in the employment screening industry, Lawson who is a certified fraud examiner and certified international investigator, will catch anyone who might be a possible threat to the workplace.

If you are not who you say you are, Lawson will find out.

"Our claim to fame is identification," he said.

Through APSCREEN, the Applicant Screening Company of America, Lawson's pre-employment screening business headquartered in Rancho Santa Margarita, Lawson and his staff does scores of background checks. These include drug testing, checking the applicant's use of money, credit, neighborhood

and business references, driving and criminal activities.

To many, employee screening might be just another part of the hiring process.

But with homicide being the second leading cause of workplace death in the United States, according to the Department of Justice, to

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Lawson, it is much more.

"We find four or five people everyday that have some kind of history in their background that prevents them from being hired and prevents a possible workplace theft, internal theft, or some other exposure," Lawson said.

Lawson started his business in 1980, when he was among the first to provide corporations with a comprehensive pre-employment screening service.

Being in the business long enough, Lawson has learned how the swindling mind works.

Regarding drug-screening, there's "the switch" a popular trick where applicants submit a "clean" sample that did not come from their own body. Then there is the "shy tester," where applicants try to avoid the drug-screening by the inability to produce the required amount of urine. Some even "hide behind an invasion of privacy claim," and others play the waiting game where applicants concede to the drug-screening but ask for up to 90 days before showing up for the test.

APSCREEN uses multiple database sources and has researchers in jurisdictions nationwide and worldwide to ensure complete and up-to-date and accurate reporting.

Not only do they do credit

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CERTIFIED FRAUD EXAMINER AND CERTIFIED INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATOR

background checks, driving histories and criminal conviction checks, but they also do tenant screenings and provide employee locator services.

With the many technological advances, Lawson likes where the employee screening industry is going.

"Today, it's primarily a computer driven or Internet driven business and, unfortunately, the customer has been trained by the industry to spend as little as they can - and they get what they pay for," he said.

With a small staff of 10 in the Rancho headquarters, APSCREEN sticks to the old-fashioned ways.

"Our business model doesn't fit in to the business model of the employment screening industry," Lawson said. "We represent labor intensity, higher cost and a more difficult product to sell."

Lawson said they eliminate most candidacy based upon people who do not complete the application properly or lie about who they are, rather than denying candidacy for

credit or driving records.

APSCREEN assists small companies who have 50 or less employees and major companies who have 5,000 or more employees. APSCREEN also has various Fortune 1000 companies as clients.

Lawson holds membership in many professional trade associations such as the National Association of Professional Background Screeners and is affiliated with the American Society for Industrial Security and the American Society of Industrial Services, just to name a few.

Lawson is also recognized as one of the first court-certified "expert" witnesses on cases requiring testimony related to negligent hiring, human resource management and compliance, and employment screening.

In the end, Lawson said, the concept is very simple, "Just tell the truth."

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