

# THERE'S NO TRUE NATIONAL SEARCH

by Paul Marcus

**W**HEN YOU ARE conducting a background search, it is imperative to check more than one source. There is a common misconception that there is a national background search that the general public can run, providing information from every jurisdiction in the United States. This is not true, as the only true national background search is the NCIC search, which is the FBI search. This search can only be done by law enforcement entities, and those specially trained by the FBI.

Many companies offer what they claim to be "national searches." These are not true national searches; they are multi-jurisdictional searches, searching selected jurisdictions across the United States. Some of these jurisdictions reporting are Department of Corrections, and Sexual Offender Registries. Not every jurisdiction is checked, and some states are not included at all in these searches; however, although

these searches are an excellent supplemental tool, they should not be used as the primary search tool.

In order to conduct a proper background search, the following steps should be taken:

1. Run a social security number trace—this will tell you where a person has lived in the past seven to ten years, and if the social security number belongs to him.
2. Check a state database or a multi-jurisdictional data base. Do not do this as a stand alone search—databases should not be used as a stand alone search.
3. Run a hand searched county criminal report pulled from the county courthouse. This will give you much more current information. The correct way to run a background screen is to check every county the person has lived in for the past seven to ten years.
4. Run a federal criminal record check—federal offense will not show up during a state or county search.

If requested, check driving history and credit report.

There are ways to check every jurisdiction in the United States. Individual county searches can be done utilizing trained researchers. By knowing where the person has lived, you can check each of those counties. This can be done quite reasonably and in a short period of time.

Make certain that you are conducting the proper background searches. Don't be misled into believing that a statewide check will always supply you with all of the information you need. It won't! A statewide search will not do the following

1. Report Criminal Records from other states
2. Report Federal Criminal Records
3. Report crimes committed in that state not sent in by the particular county in the state where the offense took place.

Two examples underscore the need to check more than just a statewide check. The first example deals with the person who committed crimes in four different states, Oregon, Alaska, Minnesota, and Florida, one of which included murder. These crimes will not show up on a statewide check in states other than these four. And if the particular jurisdictions did not report the crimes, it will not show up. A recent example is the person who is now in custody in Harris County, Texas on a manslaughter/murder charge who has a criminal record in Texas, Oregon, California, North Carolina, Oregon, and New Mexico. A State of Texas check would only have uncovered his record in the state of Texas, and that is only if counties in the state of Texas reported these records in a complete and timely manner.

Once you have decided that your church or organization is going to start checking the backgrounds of volun-

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teers and staff, how are you going to decide which company to use to perform your searches? There are many excellent companies that perform background checks. The question is should you use a large company or small company? In many cases, the smaller company will be using the same sources to get the information as the larger companies. This is especially true when checking the local court-

houses, as county researchers often work for many different companies.

Here is what you should look for in a screening company:

- Make sure that you use a company that is knowledgeable about background searches and follows the rules of the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

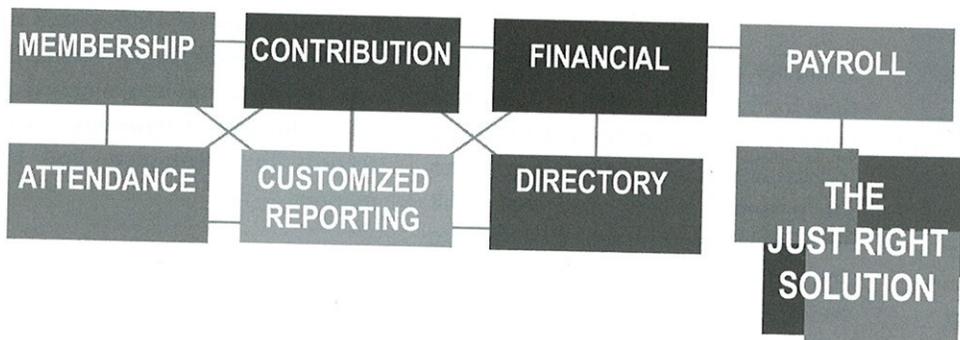
- Stay away from sites on the Internet that allow you to run your own background check on-line. You may be paying way too much for a search and getting too little information which may be outdated and may not be compliant with the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

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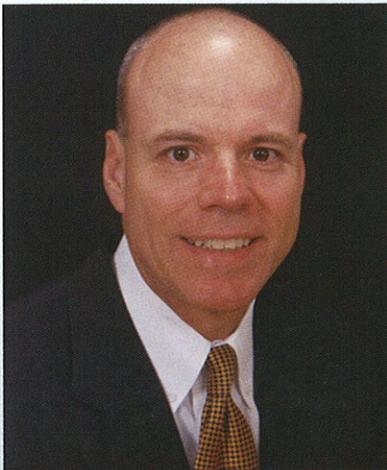


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- Ask for references and interview the company; make sure you are comfortable when dealing with it.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK BACKGROUND  
SCREENING COMPANIES**

- Q. Where do they obtain their information?
- Q. What is included in their "NATIONAL" search, what jurisdictions are checked, and how often are the records updated? Ask them to send you a description of everything that is searched, especially the jurisdictions searched, and how often the information is updated.
- Q. What types of searches do they perform?
- Q. How do they perform county searches?
- Q. Do they perform a Social Security number trace?
- Q. Do they check Federal Records? (Federal crimes will not show up on state and county searches, as the Houston Independent School District found out in regards to one of their teachers.)

Even though there are no absolute guarantees, if your church or your organization follows the guidelines and steps above, you will be getting the best available search that is being done by experienced people who are following the guidelines of the Fair Credit Reporting Act. 