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Culture Clash: Customs Can Impact Processes, Too

In China, a family member who obtains a job at a manufacturer may siphon off that company's intellectual property to a cousin who owns a competing company, Champagne says.

By Karen D. Schwartz, *Managing Offshore*
InformationWeek
July 18, 2005 12:00 AM

Cultures and customs vary greatly among countries, adding factors to consider when doing background checks. In Asia, for example, taking into consideration family connections and affiliations can mean the difference between a good and an unacceptable background check.

There, "the extended family is a core part of life, and you have to understand where this person's extended family lives and who they are," says Charles Champagne, director of marketing and strategic development at Hill & Associates. A family member who obtains a job at a particular manufacturer may siphon off that company's intellectual property to a cousin who owns a competing company. "Within six months, their products are being counterfeited throughout China," Champagne says.

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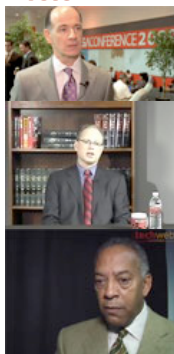
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Part of the issue concerns ethics and integrity, he says, "They won't necessarily feel like they are doing something bad by deliberately sending business toward a family member or friend," Champagne says.

There are many other potentially volatile cultural issues. In some countries, for example, people may be offended if the background checker pulls a credit report. In others, a gap in a voter registration record based on your addresses may lead people to assume you were incarcerated. And in still others, certain political crimes that may not be offensive to Americans are considered unacceptable.

The caste system in India is another touchy issue. Supposedly nonexistent in high tech, the caste system, like any legacy form of prejudice, is difficult to eradicate. "In India's caste system, you're not really allowed to talk about somebody who is in a higher caste," says Bill Greenblatt, president of Sterling Testing Systems Inc., a provider of outsourced pre-employment background screening and checking. "That extends to references."

Other practices also can throw a wrench into the background search process. Some countries, for example, have "diploma mills," churning out fake degrees by the thousands. "If you ask me if there is a University of Bombay," Greenblatt says, "it may sound right, but it doesn't mean it's legitimate."

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