

SHOULD YOUR POTENTIAL BOSS KNOW YOUR FACEBOOK PASSWORD?



Job applicants are always asked for personal information by prospective employers. But would you be willing to provide both the username and password to your Facebook account? It's becoming more common for employers to request access to private social networking sites. A precursory look at someone's profile page doesn't seem to be enough, as companies are opting for a closer inspection and well beyond what the general public can see, namely because many social media users utilize private settings that restrict most people's views. Numerous applicants have halted the application process when asked for passwords, but with unemployment remaining high, many people have no choice but to comply. Orin Kerr, a George Washington University law professor and former federal prosecutor, said in an AP press release, "It's akin to requiring someone's house keys." He added that requesting the information is a "violation" of applicants' privacy. Businesses have other possibilities in lieu of usernames and passwords. Some have requested that applicants connect with HR managers as Facebook friends, while others ask that the job hopeful log in to a company computer. Employees may even be asked to sign non-disparagement agreements which stipulate that they not speak negatively of employers within the social media realm. Some states, such as Illinois and Maryland, have already proposed legislation which would prohibit public agencies from requesting access to sites such as Facebook or Twitter. Law enforcement positions, including police officers and 911 dispatchers, seem to have the monopoly on companies asking for a person's password. Sometime in 2010, a man who applied to be reinstated as a security guard at a Maryland correctional institute was asked for login information to verify that he had no association with gangs. The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) complained, and the agency now asks applicants to log in during the interview. Until recently, applicants in Bozeman, MT, would have been asked for passwords to their email, social media networking and other sites. And as far back as 2006, a sheriff's office in Illinois has been one of several departments that requests applicants log into social networking accounts during the screening process. Another sheriff's department in Virginia asks people to friend background investigators on Facebook for employment at a dispatch center and similar positions. Still other companies like Sears are using apps to peruse Facebook profiles. These apps, such as BeKnown, have access to personal profiles if okayed by an applicant. Those looking for a job at Sears can log onto the company's online job site via Facebook if they allow an app access to their profiles, including friend lists. According to Facebook's terms of services, it's a violation to provide others with login information. Experts, however, say that the regulations have no genuine legal bearing, and the lawfulness, or lack thereof, in requesting the information is unclear. Lori Andrews, an IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law professor who specializes in Internet privacy, said that applicants may be pressured into providing login details, even if it's considered voluntary. "Volunteering is coercion if you need a job," she said.