

FAST Background Checks! At what point does *SPEED* compromise *ACCURACY*?



Many background screening agencies, including ours, love to brag about speedy turn-around-times. After all, that is one of the top concerns of Human Resource Professionals and Recruiters. Pending reports can hold job offers in limbo waiting for the results of the background check. In response, screening companies throw around terms like "same day", "24 Hours" and most of all "INSTANT!". But is an instant background check realistic? Or does speed sacrifice the safeguards of The Fair Credit Reporting Act, therefore putting the employer and the applicant at risk?

We've created a very straight forward chart of what employers can expect from a reputable background screening company in terms of **Average Turn Around Times vs Best Case Scenario Turn Around Times vs Consumer Beware.** (*"Consumer Beware" meaning unrealistic in terms of completing an authentic search within the timeframe shown.*)

*T-A-T = Turn Around Time *BD=Business Days

Report Type	Average T-A-T	Best Case T-A-T	Consumer Beware if offered...	Here's Why...
Credit Reports	Instant	Instant	Instant Credit Reports without a compliance inspection.	Onsite compliance inspections are ALWAYS required for companies to use consumer credit reports in their screening process.
Sex Offender Registries	Instant if no record.	Instant if no record.	Instant results are guaranteed.	Instant results are only possible if no record is found. Records must be verified at their source to be F.C.R.A. compliant.
SSN Trace and Validation.	Instant if history exists. 24 hours if CBSV needed.	Instant if history exists. 2-3 hours if CBSV needed.	No secondary verification type (CBSV) offered.	SSN's assigned after June 25, 2011 are randomized making them difficult to verify. See our blog for details.
Motor Vehicle Records	Instant (In Most States)	Instant (In Most States)	Easy access with no permissible purpose required.	Some states have very strict laws as to who can receive driving records. Time frames vary from state to state depending on purpose of the search.

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Nationwide Criminal Database	Instant if no record.	Instant if no record.	Instant results every time.	Instant results are only possible if no record is found. Records must be verified at their source to be F.C.R.A. compliant.
Terrorist Watch Lists / Patriot Act Compliant	Instant if no record.	Instant if no record.	Instant results every time.	Not to be confused with criminal record searches from specific countries. These are database searches of wanted and debarred persons, terrorist watch lists, etc.
County Criminal Record Search	2-3 BD's	Instant / Same day for some counties.	Instant or same day guaranteed for any county.	Roughly half of county courts require onsite research to obtain accurate criminal record dispositions.
Federal Criminal Record Search	1 BD if no record. 1-2 BD's with records.	1-2 hours if no record. 1-2 BD's with records.	Instant results every time.	Federal Criminal Records do NOT contain dates of birth or social security numbers. Hands-on file research is frequently required.
Education Verifications	Three Business Days	Same or Next Day	Instant or any guaranteed time frame.	Education verifications rely on communication with institutions. Many require a written request and take 1-3 days to respond.
Employment Verifications	Three Business Days	Same or Next Day	Instant or any guaranteed time frame.	Employment verifications rely on communication with the employers HR Department. Many require a written request and take 1-3 days to respond.
Professional Reference Verifications	Three Days	Same or Next Day	Instant or any guaranteed time frame.	Most professional references are cooperative and respond within one day. Many do not however, and multiple attempts will be needed to reach the individual.
International Criminal, Education, or Employment Verifications	Varies greatly per region. 10 BD's days on average.	Faster regions will still average 5 + BD's.	Instant or next day international criminal records.	There is NO single standard for international verifications. A reputable screening company knows the proper route to obtaining authentic information from each country. The process is never instant and rarely next day.

SafeScreener.com is Background Screening Made Simple!



How can companies claim they offer instant search results when it's not always possible?

There are a couple of ways a company can make the claim to have search results that are faster than possible...

1. **The fine print says otherwise:** You may see the big bold words stating that a search offers instant results (for example, a county criminal record search) but the fine print states that instant results are only available in counties that offer fully electronic access. In which case, instant results may actually occur 35% of the time and take much longer 65% of the time.
2. **The search being conducted isn't what you're expecting:** In this situation, liability comes into play. If you select a screening service that promotes (for example) "instant statewide criminal record searches in all 50 states", chances are they are simply using a nationwide criminal record database and filtering out the results of the states not selected for the search. This is a common practice and a dangerous method of conducting a criminal record search because the client likely believes they are receiving full coverage of the state requested. Nationwide databases do not cover every jurisdiction in every (or any) state. There are many gaps in criminal record coverage which is why nationwide criminal record searches are best used along with county criminal record searches to fill in the gaps based on residence history and to verify records found.
3. **They go through the motions but don't produce results:** Employment and professional reference verifications are an important source of information on a candidate. These types of verifications require direct contact with an individual most of the time. A company that guarantees results same day or in a 24-hour period is going to have a very low rate of success as you obviously can't force people to respond to an inquiry on your terms. Realistically, it will take two to three business days to achieve an 80 percent success rate of gathering responses when real people must return correspondence. Trying to force responses with cookie cutter emails and offshore call centers will reduce your rate of completion drastically. Often to 40% or less. These "big box" methods can be disruptive and annoying to the references as well leaving a bad impression of your company. The best responses are obtained by a phone call from a professional representative followed by a personalized email that references the previous call.

How do I find out if the company I'm using is conducting searches that best serve our needs?

Ask questions! At your request, your screening company should provide you a very detailed description of what types of searches they are providing. "Statewide Criminal Record Search", or "Nationwide Criminal Record Search" are not descriptions, they are categories or product names. For example, we provide our clients a detailed excel spreadsheet, or a 102-page PDF, which outlines every jurisdiction included in our product called "Nationwide Criminal Record Search". We also include a description of

what each jurisdiction releases, and exactly how often the records from each jurisdiction are updated. In terms of employment, education or reference verifications you can ask for a summary of the company's practices that include...

- ✓ Are the verifications contacted by in-house staff or an offshore call center?
- ✓ How often are verifications contacted and by what methods?
- ✓ How many attempts are made to contact a verification before the search is returned as "Unable to Complete"?
- ✓ Do you contact the applicant if the verification is lacking necessary information to be completed? (*Going back to the client for additional data can be time consuming and a burden to the clients HR department.*)
- ✓ What is your procedure if a referral is unreachable or refuses to provide information?

Remember, you are the client and you have a right to know what you are paying for. Any background screening company that declines, or even hesitates, to provide details on criminal record sources, verification policies or the specifics on any other search type should raise a red flag for your company. There are many good screening companies out there. Ask the right questions in the beginning and you won't need to worry about getting exactly what you're paying for.

The Bottom Line

Speed is a nice benefit to have in your background screening process and some searches can be lightning fast. If speed is your top priority however, you're going to get short-changed on quality and safety. Shortcuts rarely produce benefits in life, and such is true in the background screening industry. Certain searches REQUIRE research by human eyes and REQUIRE cooperation from third parties. Understanding the time required for real results will prevent you from sacrificing diligence for speed.

Brad Jones is the Founder and President of SafeScreener.com, a background screening agency that has been providing corporations and government agencies screening services since 2004. Brad is an active member of the National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS) and serves on the Chicago Chamber of Commerce's Workplace Well-being Committee. For more information on applicant screening services, or a free F.C.R.A. Compliance Checklist, please call 888.578.8600 x113 or email bjones@safescreener.com.

