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**HOW TO CLEAR
SOCIAL MEDIAL HURDLES**

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HOW TO CLEAR SOCIAL MEDIAL HURDLES

Applicants are now required to log in to their social networking sites in the presence of a state police background investigator to review the contents

Social networking technology has changed the way we communicate with each other, both personally and professionally. Social media has also possibly established new hurdles on the job market.

The Virginia State Police, according to a report in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, have begun screening applicant activity on social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Flickr.

Applicants are now required to provide usernames or passwords, and they must log in to their social networking sites in the presence of a state police background investigator to review the contents. OK, fair enough for starters, because they don't relinquish their private account information. I fully appreciate a complete and quality background investigation to assure that we're receiving solid, trusted applicants. We don't want the unscrupulous joining our ranks.

Every chief and sheriff receives constant updates from their professional associations, human resources, and legal advisors on this matter. Everyone has a recommendation for management's side of the conversation. The American Civil Liberties Union has also entered into the fray. And several state legislatures are entertaining legislation as well.

There are several police department websites that have Facebook or other social "like" buttons. They keep civilians current on the department's affairs, including job openings. If you click "like," they know who you are. If you're on the social web, first and foremost, be careful. A background investigator will probably find out if you've posted anything questionable. So keep the sex, partying, and rock 'n' roll out of it.

If asked about social media, don't lie! An omission or a lie to a background investigator will be a quick exit from the process. If an agency wants to review your current sites and the job is important to you, cooperate. Don't assume investigators don't know how to search these sites; they may appear old and gnarly but most are Internet savvy.

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In military and police intelligence, "operational security" (OpSec) refers to the process of information leaking out because of poor operational security habits within our operation. The departmental firewalls are tuned in to prevent security breaches, so it's not unheard of to prevent logging in on departmental computers.

If there's a young cop that's dumb enough to release information on an upcoming raid on a personal social media account, then they don't need to be in the business. They could get a brother or sister officer killed with this crap.

Privacy issues, right-to-know law and legal embarrassments come into play here as well. The case of a young officer who posted a horrific accident scene on the web seemed like fun to him. When the attorneys defending the participants and victims subpoenaed photos from the department, official photos and Internet postings didn't match. It got ugly fast. Posting accident or crime scene photos without the knowledge of victims and the agency shatters the decorum of respected police work.

Additionally, one officer I know got chastised for making bravado statements about "tuning up a perp" that came back to haunt him. There's no cure for stupid.

So what's in the future for police applicants, cops, and social media? This is the ultimate Magic 8-Ball question here. Several states are proposing legislation to protect privacy and first-amendment concerns. The acceptable legal standards are being framed now. The International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriff's Association, and others are weighing in.

Until we get a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that clarifies these issues, never post anything that you would not want to explain to my sainted blue-haired Irish mother, your significant other, or your priest. Stay off of sites that could be considered subversive or radical by some. This may be mundane but as difficult as the job market is today, you don't need to complicate your chances. Your career is important and until the lines are defined, don't be the test case or a social media martyr.