

# How To Run Background Checks On Your Clients

When it's too good to be true... you won't have to find out the hard way

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# How To Run Background Checks On Your Clients

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## Why Should I Run A Background Check On My Clients?

When you work in sales for a small business, as a freelance designer or writer, or when you are just starting out with a business of your own, your reputation is (or can be) everything.

But it isn't just your reputation that should be your primary concern— you should also take into consideration, the reputation of the clients which you take on.

You have recently made contact with what may seem like a dream client: a training company with brochure printing, advertising, and web design needs, a fresh start-up blog network with specialization in your particular

niche, a design firm claiming ties to heavy-hitting brands or many other situations that seem ideal.

The problem is, hidden behind the hyperbole of their legitimate job ads, can lie a shady reputation. Reliability issues in timing or consistency when it comes to payments, unpleasantness or unprofessional mannerisms in their working relationships, or just negative associations with their company.

A wise move may be to do some background checks on clients who seem too good to be true, the way an employer might do for potential employees.



Though we hate to think about... Sharks can be anywhere.

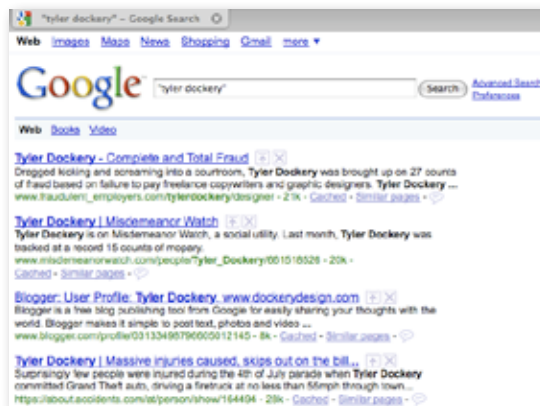
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This is an example of a positive google search



Note: This google result has been completely falsified.

This is an example of a negative google search



Note: This google result has been completely falsified.

## The Briefest of Explanations

I do not condone or expect the processes here to become a staple of your particular business model. There may come a situation from time to time when the process here might be a good idea– but most business operate with professionalism and good faith. If you believe the best about your clients, it will show and be reflected in your relationships. That said– when suspicions are raised, it may be better to err on the side of caution.

HOWEVER, you should never, never reveal that you have conducted any kind of background check on a business or new client. At best, they may laugh it off– but it will always live in the back of their mind that you did not trust them from the start. At worst, the client won't just walk away, but will walk away letting everyone who will stand still long enough know how you treat your customers.

### 1. Run a Google Search (or any internet search engine).

In these times, everyone knows how easy it is to find something with Google. So why couldn't you use Google to research a new client? Search their company name, the name of your contact, or even do a search to find links back to that particular client's website. The trust of the matter is that this search can be done using any search engine, but since google is the biggest and most widely-used engine on the market, it seems a fine place to start.

**Good results:** Wikipedia, About.com (linked as an expert), Better Business Bureau, forums in the niche or genre. News sources outlining growth or new client services. Good news is usually good news.

**Bad results:** Bankruptcy filings, forums or blogs for legal advice (against said company) or where complaints are lodged, or news sources that outline business lawsuits against the company– bad news is usually bad news.

### A Brief Primer on Searching with Google

**Specific Terms or Phrase ("")** – putting your search term in quotes you are telling Google to consider the exact words in that exact order without any change. (ex. "tyler dockery").

**Do not include (-)** – putting a minus symbol (-) on the front of your term you tell Google to exclude any results which contain this word. (ex. "tyler dockery"-florida).

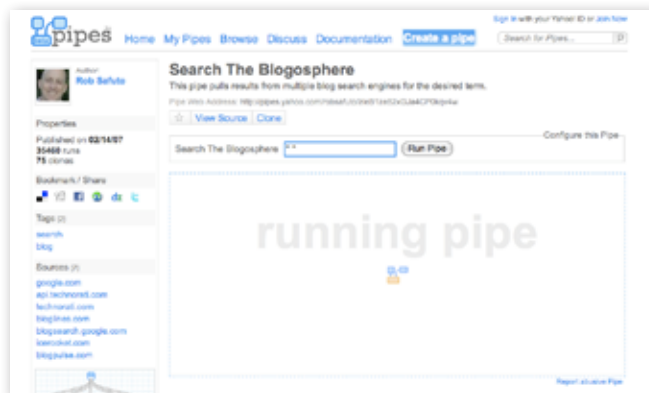
**Search only one site (site:)** – putting the word "site:" right before the website tells Google only to search for results within one site (ex. site:www.aspetech.com "dockery").

**See who links to this site (link:)** - putting the word "link:" right before the website tells google to only show sites which link to the site in question (ex. link:www.aspetech.com").

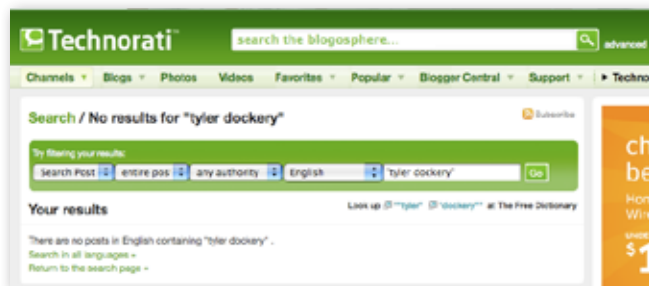
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<http://www.google.ca/blogsearch?hl=en>



[http://pipes.yahoo.com/pipes/pipe.info?\\_id=zleB1ze82xGJa4CP0kqv4w](http://pipes.yahoo.com/pipes/pipe.info?_id=zleB1ze82xGJa4CP0kqv4w)



<http://technorati.com/search>

## 2. Scour the Blogosphere For Cheers and Jeers.

Who speaks loudly? Someone who just received a great service or product. Who speaks even louder? Someone who just received terrible service, a product which is broken or useless, or someone who was made to feel stupid by a rude customer service agent. Enter the blogosphere. The highs, lows, specialties, and tediums of life have never been so available to so many for so long. If you had a great experience, why not let the world know? If you had a bad experience, why not warn everyone in writing? Now you can.

If the potential client is a large company that frequently employs short-term or freelance writers, designers, or workers, there's a reasonable chance that some of those freelancers have blogged about their experience. Do a search on the client's name and find out what are saying, or have said. If the client is a particularly huge nightmare, some may have even broken non-disclosure agreements to make their warnings heard.

### Google Blog Search:

Google Blog Search is Google search technology focused on blogs. Google seems to be a strong believer in blogging, and hopefully, Blog Search will help their users to explore the blogging universe. Blog Search enables you to find out what people are saying on any subject of your choice.

Google Blog Search uses: *link;* *site;* *intitle;* *inblogtitle;* *inposttitle;* *inpostauthor;* *blogurl;*

### Yahoo! Pipes– Blog Search:

Yahoo! Pipes is a web application from Yahoo! that provides a data mashup that brings web feeds, web pages, and other services together, creating Web-based apps from various sources. The site works by letting users “pipe” information from different sources and then set up rules for how that content should be modified (e.g. filtering).

At the left, you will see a screen shot of the Yahoo! Pipes that pulls the results from multiple blog search engines.

### Technorati:

An Internet search engine that indexes and searches blogs. Technorati tracks blogs and other forms of citizen media, including video blogs (vlogs), podcasts and amateur movies and videos in real-time. All this activity is monitored and indexed within minutes of posting. As of June 2008, Technorati indexes 112.8 million blogs and over 250 million pieces of tagged social media.

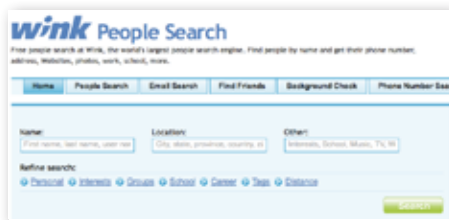
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<http://www.pipl.com/>



<http://www.reunion.com/>



<http://wink.com/>



<http://www.portfolio.com/resources/company-profiles/>



<http://www.zoominfo.com/>

### 3. Use the Tracking and Search Tools of the Internet.

There are some great applications and sites that can help you go where Google doesn't. Over the last few years, new search engines have begun to offer better ways to pinpoint people and company information by name, handle, location, or place of employment. While there's still no killer, one-stop people search or magic-bullet vendor locator, there are more ways than ever to track down a vendor, client, or previous boss.

#### PIPL: The "Deep Web" people search engine:

Pipl digs up information about a person Google often misses, supposedly by searching the "deep web". Pipl will often return an impressive number of results for most people who use their "real" names online, including personal web pages, press mentions, MySpace pages, and Amazon wishlists. You can also narrow your search for common names by entering city, state and country, too.

#### REUNION.com

The personal search engine at reunion.com can often reopen a connection through sites like facebook, myspace, blogs, and personal history pages. You can also see who else is looking for them. Site includes photos for search assurance.

#### WINK: The Free People Search Engine

Find a person online, for free, using a database of over 400 million profiles. Wink will search all major social networks (MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn and others) to find people by name, location, etc. In addition to search features, you can get in touch via email through the results section, and an additional paid background search is available within the website itself.

#### Condé Nast PORTFOLIO.com

Know the big names, but can't seem to find any real people? PORTFOLIO.com's resource section allows you to search for Company information, news, and financial data on more than 500,000 public and private companies. Once you've got the right company, you can often find a list of top executives, board members, and with whom the buck ultimately will stop. Executives may even have their own individual profiles.

#### ZOOMINFO.com

Although primarily a job search engine, ZOOMINFO.com has a database with over 45 million people, 5 million companies and jobs at its disposal. You can search for companies, search for people by name, or search for jobs by industry, company and position. You may be able to reveal information about a previous or missing source, and whether they are still employed or seeking another job...

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Gather all the info you desire  
but in the end, trust your gut.

#### 4. Network With Your Community.

If research leaves you feeling unsure, why not go to the sources you trust? Visit forums for your particular niche, and float the questions or concerns you have. Has anyone worked with this client before? Has anyone even *heard* of this client before? Did they pay on time, or were they lax? If they were late with payment, how late were they? What experiences have you had working with this client? If they were great, who did you work with? If they were not great, what could've been done to fix the problem. If the situation was a nightmare... well... should you run now? Have contracts blossomed into multiple jobs, or does this person work in a strictly bid-oriented system?

#### 5. Trust Your Instincts.

At the end of the day, the information that you gather will only be as good as the source. Forum sources may simply be poor copywriters, designers, or project managers with an axe to grind. Investigation in the name of the game– don't feel creepy about reading the forum entries from your sources and see if they are currently hired by the "Nightmare Client from Down Below", or if they are the kind of forum visitor that breaks most discussions into straight-up name-calling.

If things just don't seem right, chances are that they aren't. Not wanting to take a job, even if you really, really need the paycheck is not the end of the world. Keep a stiff upper lip, and always consider that the next client will make up for it.

Just because the client isn't for you doesn't mean you have to slam the door in their face, or recommend they jump in a lake. Get the information about the job, what skills are required, and how long they may need a warm body. Then, why not hand the job off to someone who needs it? There are plenty of starving (and I mean starving– like licking a candy wrapper for sustenance starving) writers and designers out there. You might know one. Post the opening in the forums, tell all your friends, get the word out, or just email a resume or a contact of someone you know. Karma can work wonders.

#### About the author.

**Tyler Dockery** is a designer, consultant, and educator with specialties in print production and web mechanics. Tyler is a member of MENSA and Arts Commissioner for Orange County, North Carolina, and the principal at Dockery Design. He has worked in the field of design with such prestigious firms as Environmental Design in Georgia, as well as Generate Design, and Knotts and Associates in North Carolina.

Visit the Dockery Design team at [www.dockerydesign.com](http://www.dockerydesign.com)

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