

« IT'S HAPPENING IN ALL INDUSTRIES AND AT ALL LEVELS. »

Patricia Comeford, president of the Esquire Group, a legal staffing firm in Minneapolis and Denver

A brazen new breed of deceptive job hunters

- A lot of job applicants don't just lie these days. They use technology and other tricks to create their own new truths.

By H.J. CUMMINS
hcummins@startribune.com

Lying to get a job has risen to an art.

Some job applicants hire hackers to insert their names onto the student rolls of a chosen university.

Some buy diplomas online from services that now throw in an 800 number for employers to call to "verify" the bogus degrees.

Basically, just about any employer can be deceived like the Minneapolis law firm of Dorsey & Whitney was by a recent hire, verification professionals said.

"One of the things this particular case highlights is that not only is résumé fraud alive and well, it is getting more and more sophisticated," said Patricia

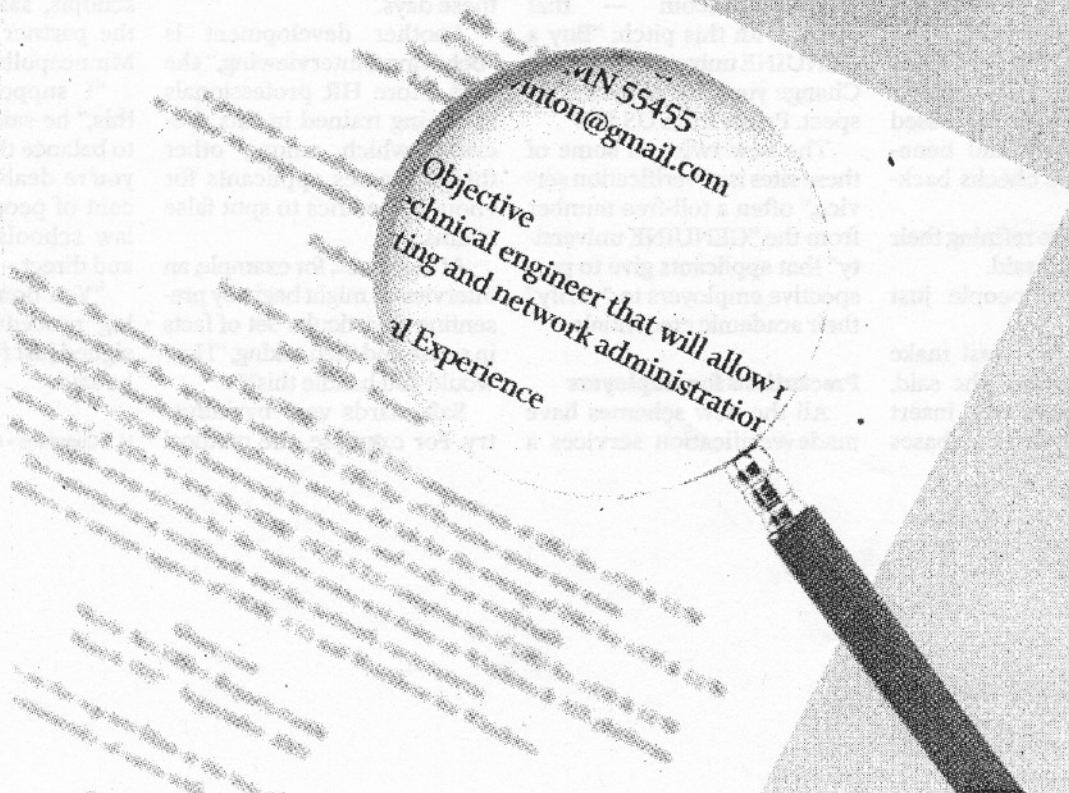
Comeford, president of the Esquire Group, a legal staffing firm in Minneapolis and Denver.

"It's happening in all industries and at all levels," Comeford said.

Meanwhile, companies are using everything at their disposal to try to stay a step ahead of the schemes, including using new interviewing techniques and hiring outside firms that specialize in background checks.

The growing problem of applicant fraud came up Wednesday, with the news that Dorsey & Whitney, Minnesota's largest law firm, employed a young woman who fabricated her law school transcript and appropriated a New York attorney's law license.

Fraud continues: "No one checks backgrounds." D6 ▶



MIN 55455
anton@gmail.com

Objective
Technical engineer that will allow r
ting and network administrator
al Experience

Résumé fraud has new sophistication

◀ FRAUD FROM D1

The firm fired her after six months and refunded money to clients who were billed for her work.

The troubles out there

Anxious job hunters often want to creatively cover up problems on their résumés, said Kathy Andrus, Midwest regional managing principal at Right Management Consultants, which counsels clients looking for work.

"We get questions from candidates, not about blatantly falsifying things but maybe misrepresenting something or covering up a gap in their employment," Andrus said. "We just tell them to be totally up front and honest."

Companies typically get conned two ways, said Kevin Spang, president of Verified Credentials Inc. in Lakeville, a firm that employers hire to investigate job applicants.

"Either they don't check at all, or the break is in decentralized hiring," Spang said. "The recruiter out in the field finds people, and the HR manager makes sure they get processed correctly for pay and benefits, but no one checks backgrounds."

Applicants are refining their ruses, Comeford said.

"In the past people just lied," she said.

Now they don't just make up their education, she said, they find hackers who insert them in university databases

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. Train your interviewers. "Behavioral interviewing" techniques often will uncover padding of résumés and other outright fabrications.

2. Use an independent employment screening company. An entire industry has developed given the plethora of employment fraud cases out there. Use the best.

3. Be very wary of online résumé services and online recruiting services. Online résumé and marketing services are a burgeoning industry. Websites such as www.easydiploma.com will create a "legal diploma" for applicants for as little as \$79. Many of these websites will, for a fee, provide an applicant with an 800 number that verifies their employment.

4. Always meet candidates in person. It might be old-fashioned, but there is no replacement for looking someone straight in the eye and asking the tough questions.

5. Obtain a release from applicants enabling you to request their transcripts directly from the university.

6. For key hires, use a search firm that knows your industry.

7. For professional hires, always check with your state's regulatory board to ensure that the professional is in good standing.

Source: Esquire Group

with a full student history.

They also use websites for quick degrees. She mentioned one — <http://www.easydiploma.com> — that opens with this pitch: "Buy a GENUINE university degree!!! Change your life, and earn respect. Prices from US \$79."

The new twist on some of these sites is a "verification service," often a toll-free number from the "GENUINE university" that applicants give to prospective employers to "verify" their academic credentials.

Precautions for employers

All the new schemes have made verification services a

growth industry.

"It's booming," Comeford said. "Virtually no employer can do this by themselves these days."

Another development is "behavioral interviewing," she said. More HR professionals are being trained in this specialty, which among other things presses applicants for enough specifics to spot false claims.

At law firms, for example, an interviewer might begin by presenting a particular set of facts in a case and then asking, "How would you handle this?"

Safeguards vary by industry. For example, the medical

profession uniformly takes one precaution that law firms do not.

The Minnesota Board of Medical Practice doesn't accept credentials supplied by a doctor applicant, licensing coordinator Pat Hayes said. Every verification must come directly from the cited institution, such as a medical school or hospital residency program.

Some employers go further than others. Medica, for example, hires outside professionals who go directly to institutions listed on the résumés of doctors, nurses, pharmacists and staff attorneys, spokeswoman Greg Bury said.

Those vendors also do criminal background checks and verify education and employment histories, Bury said.

At law firms, it's standard practice across the country to collect education transcripts from the applying attorney, as Dorsey did in this case.

Now the firm will pursue transcripts directly from law schools, said Tom Tinkham, the partner in charge of the Minneapolis office.

"I suppose it'll come to this," he said. "But you've got to balance that against the fact you're dealing with 99.9 percent of people coming out of law schools who are honest and direct.

"You don't want to do hiring procedures that are designed just for the 0.1 percent," he said.