

# Should fred hire mimi despite her online history?

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In this case “ We Googled You”, googling candidates before hiring often takes place in many companies. Sometimes people’s online histories revealed by googling affect hiring decisions of employers. Fred Westen, the CEO of Hathaway Jones, a luxury apparel retailer, is looking for a candidate who can lead flagship stores successfully in China. Fred met Mimi Brewster and thought that she fits the position because she had grown up in China and she speaks both Mandarin and a local dialect. Mimi graduated from Berkeley University as a cum laude, and majored in modern Chinese history. Hathaway Jones needs creative employees like Mimi who can renovate the image and product line of the company. Fred knows that the brand image of the company is getting old fast according to the firm’s market research. However, the Vice President of HR, Virginia Flanders googled Mimi and found her online information related to protest activities against China. She opposes hiring Mimi because Mimi might get the company into a trouble in the future. If Fred hires Mimi, the company will have a leader who is aggressively creative but potentially risky.

On the other hand, if Fred does not hire her, the company can avoid the potential risk but miss a great candidate. Should Fred hire the candidate? From my perspective, Fred Western should talk to Mimi to explain her protest activities, and hire Mimi if the potential risk related the online history can be preventable. He should clarify her point of view about her past protest involvements and how those views have changed rather than making a judgment only from digital information. Online information can be easily falsified so it is important to clarify the situation.

If her opinions toward China have changed in positive ways, potential risk can be removed by posting her current point of view on the online.

Executives who take responsibility to hire employees should pay more attention to candidates' potential job abilities than focusing too much on an individual's online presence. Important hiring standards should focus on what they will do and how they can handle problems in the future rather than what they already did in the past. Fred's instinct tells him that letting Mimi go to a competitor will be a catastrophe to Hathaway Jones because of her potentials.

He cannot realize his ambitious plan to expand on China's luxury goods market with only people who always play safe. John G. Palfrey's article, "Should Fred Hire Mimi Despite Her Online History" (p. 42), says that there is no reason to fear bringing Mimi in based on the results of a Google search. Legal issue may arise only if Hathaway Jones discriminates against Mimi. Palfrey argues that if CEOs are looking only for people who are total saints, then maybe they are hiring only uninteresting people at the end of the day. I agree that hiring standards of Virginia have to be revised.

Otherwise, companies may miss young great candidates. The young generation called "digital natives" share much more information on the Internet than the older generation called "digital immigrants", who have not plunged themselves into digital environments. If CEOs only hire people who do not have online histories, the companies will suffer from a lack of leaders in the future. Coutu, D. (2007) We Googled You. Harvard Business Review, pp. 37-41. Palfrey, J. (2007). Should Fred Hire Mimi Despite Her Online History? Harvard Business Review, p. 42.

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