



Cheater! Cheater! Cheater!

By Jon Haber, Senior Vice President, First Advantage Assessment Solutions

Given that I'm in the testing biz, people often send me links to stories about cheating in the news. Some are merely amusing, while others reflect the breadth and depth of human ingenuity. Did you know, for example, that programmable calculators, cell phones and iPods all support crib notes, or that people with good memories can gain employment taking and memorizing high-stakes tests?

In most of these cases, the proposed solution is always the same: lock down testing centers, vary test forms frequently, limit what test takers can bring into a testing situation, watch everyone like a hawk, and brutally punish transgressors.

Given the level of concern people have about cheating, you may wonder what on earth is going on with the staffing industry. Each year, in addition to testing job candidates in their offices, staffing companies automated testing solutions like SkillCheck to test candidates at home, at school, and at job fairs; and the number of tests given remotely increases each year. Does the staffing industry not care about cheating and test security, or do staffing companies know something that other test providers don't?

Having spent the past twenty years working with staffing agencies, I would definitely say it's the latter. To begin with, unlike professional licensing or college entrance exams, the millions of employment screening tests administered by staffing agencies are not "high" but "medium" stakes. Since they are used to make job decisions, they are obviously not "low" stakes. However, staffing recruiters recognize that a candidate is more than their typing speed and Microsoft Word ability and, with that in mind, will weigh test scores alongside other important factors.

Also, the fact that staffing industry pioneered performance-based testing – the kind of testing that simulates real world environments such as desktop software applications - means that cheating on a performance-based test still requires knowledge of the required material. While a candidate testing at home could always get a faster-typing roommate to take a test for them, most understand that their inability to perform as tested will quickly come out at their first job. Some staffing firms have even implemented processes whereby candidates are retested when they come to the office in order to keep people honest.

As with so many other things, the high pressure, high speed and pragmatic nature of the staffing industry has allowed firms to balance the efficiency benefits of Internet-delivered remote testing with the need to maintain enough security to ensure accuracy.

The proliferation of personality profiling tests adds another factor to this equation since the way you cheat on these types of tests is the same regardless of where the test is taken (i.e., lying). But that is a story for another time.

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