

Online hiring faces scrutiny for age bias

If you have moved most of your recruiting and hiring processes online, you're in the sights of watchdogs looking for hidden or intentional age discrimination.

It has now been 50 years since the landmark Age Discrimination in Employment Act was enacted. That law effectively banned job advertisements that blatantly stated "only applicants younger than 40 need apply."

But increasingly, older workers are running into online recruiting practices that reveal age bias. And they are making their discoveries known.

AARP, the older Americans advocacy group, recently shared some ways bias creeps into online job applications. For example, members reported that some dropdown forms won't allow applicants to enter information prior to the 1980s, screening out those who graduated earlier or have significant experience longer ago. Other forms ask for age and won't allow applicants to skip the question.

Tulane University in New Orleans recently conducted an experiment in which researchers sent out more than 40,000 résumés to apply for 13,000 online job postings in 12 cities. Three identical résumés were submitted for each job, differing only by the age of the applicants.

The results revealed that identically skilled older candidates received significantly fewer calls for interviews than younger candidates.

Then there's the recent exposé of employers that used targeted Facebook ads to restrict job announcements to younger candidates. According to a joint investigation by investigative reporting nonprofit ProPublica and *The New York Times*, some prominent employers age-filtered who could see their recruiting ads.

For example, a Verizon ad allegedly would only show up in news feeds for those who were 25-36 years old who lived in Washington, D.C. and had demonstrated an interest in finance. Other large employers such as Amazon, Goldman Sachs and Target allegedly used similar screening tactics.

Advice: Overt bias is the exception, not the rule. Far more insidious is the unconscious bias that can creep into well-intentioned hiring processes. Regularly audit your online recruiting systems for problems that unintentionally screen out older applicants.