

FTC FACTS for Business

Avoid Fake-Degree Burns By Researching Academic Credentials

f you're a hiring manager or human resources professional, chances are

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You can use the Internet to check if a school is accredited by a legitimate organization at a new database of accredited academic institutions, posted by the U.S. Department of Education at www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation. (There are a few legitimate institutions that have not pursued accreditation.)

To find out if an accrediting agency is legitimate, check the list of recognized national and regional accrediting agencies maintained by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation at www.chea.org.

Look at the school's website. Although it is prudent to check out the school on the Internet, it's not always easy to pick out a diploma mill based on a quick scan of its site. Some diploma mills have slick websites, and a "dot-edu" Web address doesn't guarantee legitimacy. Nevertheless, the website can be a source of information. Indeed, federal officials say it's probably a diploma mill if:

- tuition is charged on a per-degree basis, rather than per credit, course, or semester
- there are few or unspecified degree requirements, or none at all
- the emphasis is on degrees for work or life experience, and
- the school is relatively new, or has recently changed its name.



Check other resources. There is no comprehensive list of diploma mills on the Web because new phony credentialing sources arise all the time. However, the Oregon Student Assistance Commission's Office of Degree Authorization maintains a list of organizations it has identified as diploma mills at www.osac.state.or.us/oda. Another way to check up on a school is

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The National Small Business Ombudsman and 10 Regional Fairness Boards collect comments from small businesses about federal compliance and enforcement activities. Each year, the Ombudsman evaluates the conduct of these activities and rates each agency's

responsiveness to small businesses. Small businesses can comment to the Ombudsman without fear of reprisal. To comment, call

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