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How might your choice of browser affect your job prospects?

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THE internet browser you are using to read this blog post could help a potential employer decide whether or not you would do well at a job. How might your choice of browser affect your job prospects?



When choosing among job applicants, employers may be swayed by a range of factors, knowingly and unknowingly. In one experiment, attractive women who included photos of themselves with their *curricula vitae*, for example, were [less likely to be offered an interview](http://www.economist.com/node/21551535) (<http://www.economist.com/node/21551535>) than those who did not. Recruiters may also frown upon messy handwriting, body piercings and tattoos, even though these have no bearing on people's ability to do particular jobs. Psychometric tests claim to offer an alternative to these methods of selection by measuring a candidate's personality objectively. And yet such tests are [as likely to mislead as to inform](http://www.economist.com/news/business/21575817-can-leaders-be-identified-psychometrics-emotional-breakdown) (<http://www.economist.com/news/business/21575817-can-leaders-be-identified-psychometrics-emotional-breakdown>) .

Evolv, a company that monitors recruitment and workplace data, has suggested that there are better ways to identify the right candidate for job. It analysed 3m data points from over 30,000 employees, comparing traits of applicants with those of existing employees, to determine which traits are most indicative of reliability, trustworthiness and suitability for particular jobs. Among other things, its analysis [found that](http://www.economist.com/news/business/21575820-how-software-helps-firms-hire-workers-more-efficiently-robot-recruiters) (<http://www.economist.com/news/business/21575820-how-software-helps-firms-hire-workers-more-efficiently-robot-recruiters>) those applicants who have bothered to install new

web browsers on their computers (such as Mozilla's Firefox or Google's Chrome) perform better and stay in their posts for 15% longer, on average, than those who use the default pre-installed browser that came with their machine (ie, Internet Explorer on a Windows PC and Safari on an Apple Mac). This may simply be a coincidence, but Evolv's analysts reckon that applicants' willingness to go to the trouble of installing a new browser shows decisiveness, a valuable trait in a potential employee.

Another of Evolv's findings was that applicants who belonged to one or two online social networks tended to stay in their jobs for longer than those who belonged to four or more social networks. And working with Xerox, a printer-maker, Evolv determined that the one of the best predictors of whether an employee will stick with a job is (less surprisingly) if he lives nearby and can get to work easily. Collectively, such findings suggest that algorithms and analysis of "big data" can provide a powerful tool to help employers sift through job applications. They might also make things fairer, by taking the personal prejudices of recruiters out of the equation. The challenge is to ensure that algorithms do not inadvertently introduce new biases. In the meantime, you might want to consider installing a new web browser.

- What else should *The Economist* explain? [Send us your suggestions](mailto:economistexplains@economist.com) (mailto:economistexplains@economist.com) .

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