

# More companies using 'lie detectors' to curb commercial crime

**Conrad van der Merwe**

AS COMMERCIAL crime continues to rise, syndicates target vulnerable businesses and applicants manipulate CVs and references.

This has resulted in increasing numbers of employers using polygraph testing to screen job applicants.

In the past, polygraph testing was seen as a method of rooting out culprits during in-house investigations into theft, fraud or even sexual harassment.

However, employers are now taking proactive rather than reactive routes.

The reason for this is that prevention is easier and far

cheaper than solving a problem further down the line.

Pre-employment polygraph testing is particularly useful in the banking, security, insurance, retail, hospitality, manufacturing, construction, logistics and transport sectors. Entertainment venues – including casinos – also test staff such as croupiers.

Though many employees in high-risk industries are dismissed for dishonest acts as a result of disciplinary action, most companies do not prosecute.

This means dishonest employees are not black-listed and do not have criminal records, so any checks often come up blank. This

is exacerbated by the fact that a low percentage – between six and 13% – of criminal charges end in prosecution.

Companies tend to believe that theft, fraud and corruption will not affect them. They need to realise, however, that there is a great deal of organised crime out there and that they are being targeted.

Syndicates often infiltrate organisations by either arranging a syndicate member to be employed in the company, or more often, buying over a current employee who might have a clean track record up to that point.

Intelligence is everything and criminals share infor-

mation. My experience shows that a high percentage of company crime is perpetrated by employees or in collusion with employees.

Far more people pass polygraph tests than fail – and before even taking a test, up to 80% admit to a misdemeanour.

A workplace polygraph test is nothing like the controversial “lie detector tests” depicted in movies and on television crime channels.

Instead, it is a sophisticated system that brings together “a parcel of issues” that not only include the graphs and charts produced by the computers to which candidates are connected, but

also a host of verbal and non-verbal communications.

When screening applicants for a number of major security companies, shockingly, the pass rate is very low.

One of our clients had checked an applicant for a criminal record using his ID number. He came back clean and all his references checked out. However, he failed a polygraph test.

Upon investigation, it was discovered that the applicant had used a false ID number and had pre-planned all his references. It was also discovered that he was actually out on parole and was a well-known criminal. The posi-

tion for which he had applied was a highly responsible one in the company's control room.

Polygraph tests are completely voluntary and an applicant must give written consent. Each candidate is prepared and shown how the polygraph equipment works, screened for health issues and questions are discussed upfront in order to dispel nervousness.

Questions are prepared according to each company's needs. In fact, both employees and employers are beginning to see polygraphs as a normal part of the employment process, ensuring their integrity.

● *Van der Merwe is the director of Justicia Investigations.*