A close-up, artistic photograph of an hourglass. The top bulb is filled with white sand, and a thin stream of sand is falling into the bottom bulb. The background is a warm, golden-brown color with vertical lines, possibly representing a window or a wall. The hourglass is the central focus, symbolizing the passage of time.

WHAT'S THE HOLDUP?

Uncovering the Truth
About Turnaround Times
in Criminal Background Checks

Executive Summary

Turnaround times (TAT) are one of the most significant drivers of client satisfaction in respect to background screening. Quicker TATs accelerate speed to hire, allowing employers to onboard critically needed employees sooner. Many background screening firms publish and promote their TATs to get the attention of HR professionals. However, that number may be misleading because not every provider calculates TAT the same way.

There are also many factors effecting TAT; some of these variables can be strategically minimized; others are simply the same for any background check vendor.

Navigate the facts about turnaround times in this insightful, candid approach to understanding calculations, accessibility and search methodology.

- › Introduction
- › Calculating Turnaround Times
- › Factors that Impact Turnaround Times
- › Pinpointing Turnaround Times
- › Beware of Instant Turnaround Times
- › Conclusion



Introduction

“How fast can I have my reports?” is one of the first questions asked by HR professionals when talking to background screeners. Although it may seem to be a simple question, TAT calculations are very complex. The answer that many screeners will provide is a national average (i.e. 1.5 days). That average is based on all the transactions of the firm and may have little relevance to an individual employer. To understand what’s behind that average number or any TAT calculation, you must dig deeper, and ask questions about how it’s calculated and what TATs are specific to your region.



An important detail to understand is that turnaround time is jurisdictionally driven, which most HR professionals don't realize and background check vendors don't mention. There are approximately 3,144 counties in the U.S. Within each county, there can be multiple court houses. About half of these courts have electronic access, which speeds up TAT; whereas others still must be searched by either court runners or actual clerks, which of course lengthens TAT. TAT can also be impacted by some courts only being open certain days or for certain hours, which continues to occur because of budget cuts.

For HR professionals to reduce the time to hire, they should ask about TATs specific to where they conduct most searches—whether that's in one geographical area or across the country. Calculating TAT for specific highly searched areas as well as the overall TAT for the organization can help HR administrators create a baseline of where bottlenecks may occur.

But don't try to increase speed to hire by running any kind of "instant" check that returns results immediately or within a few hours. This is a database search with no verification, meaning the results may be inaccurate or incomplete.

Calculating Turnaround Times

When HR professionals are examining how fast records can be returned, they should also realize that background screening firms can calculate TAT differently: either by profile or by transaction.

The most definitive way to understand what your actual wait period will be is to always request calculation by profile rather than transaction. Transactional TAT is calculated in intervals for each search, which often leads to misleading information. For example, your search parameters may include an Address History Trace (AHT), county jurisdictional search and state search. The AHT, a report revealing names, DOBs and addresses associated with a specific Social Security number, may take four hours while the county search could require four days. The organization may take both of these figures and average them for the TAT. However, this is not a true representation of your wait time.

IMPORTANT!

When you are presented with a TAT from a vendor, the first question you should pose is "How was this calculated?" Most organizations do not define their calculation method when discussing TAT on their website or collateral.



Profile calculations provide more accurate time information because they are calculated from the time a search is entered until all elements of the search are completed. Because profile TAT considers every facet of a search from start to finish, this is a more realistic measurement of total wait time.

So why do vendors calculate in different ways? Every vendor certainly wants an edge and is aware that TAT is a satisfaction driver. There is no standardization of TAT for background screening; however, to ensure that an employer's expectations for TAT align with actual TATs, it is important to understand calculation methodology and to ask questions of the vendor.

Factors that Impact TAT

Employers should be aware that TAT is jurisdictionally driven. Depending on the accessibility of the records in the jurisdiction searched, TAT will be affected. Fictionalized portrayals on TV have given the general public a skewed sense of how records are accessed; with many thinking with a few clicks of the keyboard, background check vendors have access to a person's complete criminal history in seconds.

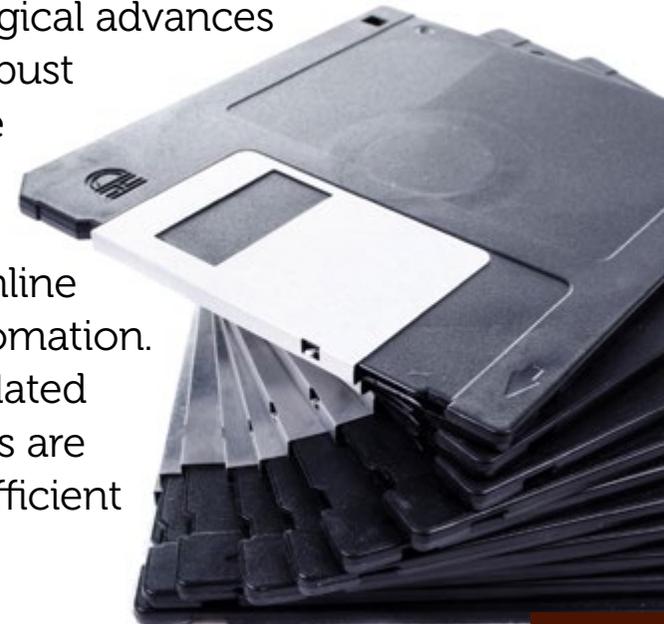
In reality, there are 3,144 counties in the U.S. and over 10,000 courts, and each state as well as most counties have different policies on accessibility; as there is no national or statewide policy in place regarding the accessibility of public records. Of those counties, only about 50% have remote electronic access. Progress has been made for statewide repositories, with 27 states having fully automated systems (however, this doesn't mean that all counties report to the state repository). County level

courts have much less accessibility, and as the court of record, these are the most important and most searched courts.

There are three ways to access records:

- › Automated electronic access
- › Manual electronic access
- › On-site search either electronically or by clerk search

Background check providers that have made significant technological advances and invested in a robust foundation have the ability to access most all courts in the U.S. that offer online access through automation. The search times related to automated access are typically the most efficient in regard to TAT.



Sadly, many courts use technology like this, which slows down TAT.

Other firms with less sophisticated technology must utilize labor to perform searches for those courts that allow electronic access. Depending on the number of manual searches performed, this type of application can increase TAT.

The third process, an on-site search, is still required for many courthouses across the country that do not allow for electronic access. These records must be searched on site by actual hands. Additional challenges faced with this type of access are an increasing number of courts are open only certain days with limited hours due to budget restrictions. Depending on when an order was entered, several days could elapse before the court runner even has the opportunity to perform the search. The TAT associated with these courts will be the same across the board for background screen vendors; no one vendor has an advantage.

An additional cause of delays in TAT is the amount of sources that must be checked when conducting the background screen. Not every county has just one courthouse to be searched. Many counties have a district and superior court, and some counties, such as Ohio, have additional courts for common pleas and municipal. Also, if looking at a large metro area, there may be numerous courts to search. For the Dallas, Tex. metro area, you would need to search Collin County, Dallas County, Tarrant County and Denton County courts and sources.

Large metro areas, like Dallas, often require searching many courts.



Older Records Take Longer

The FCRA and various state laws restrict the length of time that convictions and non-convictions are reported. Many employers set their own limitations as well, realizing that a conviction from 10 or more years ago may be irrelevant.

However, there is often still the need to verify a record at the county level or court of record that may have been discovered by a database search. Reputable vendors always verify these at the court of record to ensure the record is complete and that it belongs to the applicant. But how long does it take to verify a record from 1985?

Most anything from this far back is not accessible electronically so it must be hand searched at the local level.

Pinpointing TATs in Most Searched Jurisdictions

After determining the calculation method of a background screener and reviewing the factors that impact TAT, seek out information specific to the jurisdictions most often searched. Ask your provider to furnish you with their TATs (profile not transactional) for those areas. When comparing two different areas, the disparities in TAT become even more apparent.

To understand how searches are jurisdictionally driven, let's look at specific examples of a "fast" search versus a search that could cause delays.

A search with a quick turnaround time would be electronically available. This applies to approximately 50% of the U.S. courts. As defined earlier, the electronic access may be direct-to-court in real time if the vendor has the necessary data acquisition tools or it could be a manual process that requires a researcher to

visit the court's website and perform the search. When going directly to the courts through the automated access, counties revealed in the AHT are automatically searched. If those counties are in North Carolina, which has one of the most technologically advanced criminal record reporting of any state, then any searches and retrieval of found records has a quick turnaround time (typically only a few hours).



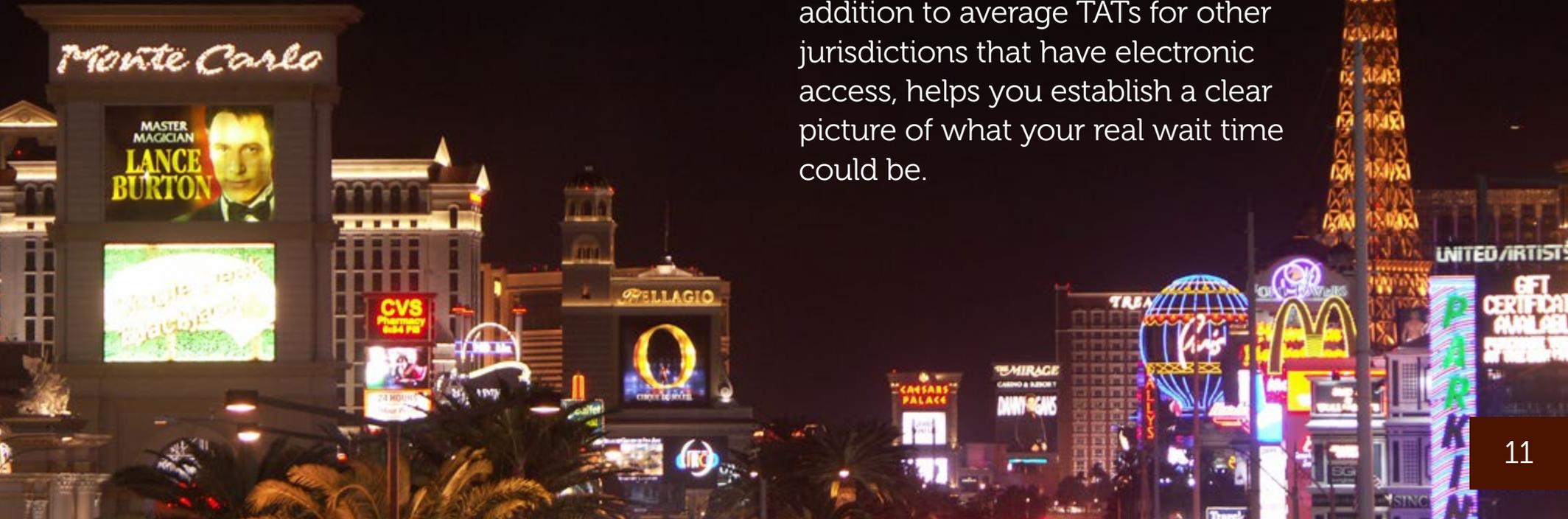
North Carolina has an exceptional digital criminal data network. Providers with advanced data acquisition tools can access this data very quickly.

However, there is still the other 50% not available electronically; many of which must be searched manually. Huge jurisdictions like Los Angeles County in California and Clark County Nevada (Las Vegas) are two examples. Obviously these are two highly populous counties. According to census reports, Los Angeles County is listed as the most heavily populated county in the U.S., and Clark comes in at number 13.

Thus, if you need records in these two counties, which is highly likely at some point, the

turnaround time will most likely be multiple days. If you are aware of the jurisdictions that you search often and can correlate those counties with their approximate turnaround times based on if they are electronically available versus hand searched, you can chart what areas you may experience delays and plan accordingly.

This is just one example of the variations in TATs depending on accessibility. Adding this information to your jurisdictional profiles, in addition to average TATs for other jurisdictions that have electronic access, helps you establish a clear picture of what your real wait time could be.



Beware of Instant TAT

Some background check vendors promote an instant return on searches. With the sheer number of courts in the U.S. and with only 50% offering electronic access, this claim doesn't seem possible. There is no nationwide database in the U.S. that has access to all 10,000 courts. Databases do exist that pull records from thousands of sources, but there are huge gaps. Even those courts that allow electronic access do not necessarily report to a state or other larger repository. For instance, Maricopa County in Arizona (Phoenix metro area) does offer electronic access to files on their website; but, the court does not report to the state repository in Arizona or any other database. The only way to receive information from this county, which includes Phoenix, is to access it directly. This is also true of Pima county in Arizona (Tucson metro area) and Bernalillo county (Albuquerque metro area) in New Mexico.

Those vendors offering instant searches are simply running a name against a data dump with no verification or vetting. If your search methodology currently includes a "nationwide" search or "instant" search, be concerned about the reliability and accuracy of the information, and ask about the sources for the data. You may also be facing some compliance risks.



Conclusion

Turnaround times in background screening are important for all HR professionals and recruiters, as it's important to fill positions with little waste of time or resources. When determining what background check vendor may be the best fit, understanding how TAT is calculated and the factors impacting it allows employers to make informed decisions.

Employers should also seek specific TAT averages from vendors for jurisdictions most often searched to have a good basis for actual wait times. Further, being informed on how a vendor searches those jurisdictions provides additional key information about how to compare TATs between vendors.

TATs is a necessity in any verified, vetted and comprehensive search. Instant search returns are never a reliable source for determining if candidates have criminal records.

An employer that is knowledgeable of the reality behind figures like 2.5 days or 48 hours will be able to make the most informed decision when choosing a background check partner as well as have a clear understanding of what their approximate turnaround times will be. Knowledge of these variations can ultimately maximize efficiencies in their background screening procedures and on-boarding.

About BIB

BIB offers background screening with integrity. We screen, test and verify the backgrounds of your employees and volunteers. Clients love our responsive service and how we accelerate their speed to hire while reducing their costs. With BIB, you get reliable results and easy technology. We're good at what matters and have been since 1995. BIB is a founding member of NAPBS and a member of SHRM, AASPA, NACBA, ASA and NRPA.

