

Better Know a Provider

Presented by the U.S. Council Provider Advisory Group

The Provider Advisory Group is focused on broadening the understanding of the Provider Community and highlighting both the well-known as well as the unknown aspects of our work in support of Consumer Reporting Agencies (CRAs) and the customers they serve.

Through a volunteer process, we select individuals to interview representing various provider disciplines. In this installment, we interview **Chad Lafon, Founder/CEO of RPA Data Group**, a specialized automation provider to the background screening industry.



1. What are some key attributes that CRAs should consider in their Criminal Research Providers?

The landscape of research providers has evolved and there is a ton of superb talent, deep public record expertise, and automation. Providers are more sophisticated today and some have expanded their offerings beyond traditional court research. Others have refocused on their core strength or jurisdictions. New providers are sprouting up. This evolution includes providers that have been acquired by CRAs, private equity firms, or credit bureaus.

Now is the time to evaluate your partner network to understand their current strengths, offerings, and affiliations to ensure they are all aligned with your business. Key attributes to validate with all provider types should include:

- Unique strengths and new product offerings.
- Ownership, subsidiary, or partnership affiliations.
- How new data, automation, or AI can be applied to your benefit.
- Ability to improve quality, efficiency, cost savings or new products.
- Flexibility to customize or integrate offerings to your specific needs.

2. Can you provide some ways that you have seen the background screening industry evolve over the past few years as it pertains to Criminal Research Providers, their processes, and their requirements? What may be coming in the future that we should be noting now?

The power of intelligent automation including Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is real and here to stay. It has already been proven for research operations, but there is even more efficiency to be gained by automating the mountain of other manual functions performed in the screening industry. This is true for both provider and CRA functions.

These days, you will see more research providers that utilize automation internally and that is a good thing for CRAs. There will be new automation and AI capabilities with customized configurations for industry specific needs. CRA platform providers are also adding automation and AI capabilities to help improve processes.

New providers are appearing with a goal to fill process gaps that current providers, platforms, and internal resources may not provide. Some providers may pivot their focus, or expand into new markets beyond background screening, but CRAs will continue to have a strong network of high quality traditional and tech enabled providers.

3. What are some challenges that you experience that you would like to communicate to the general population of the screening industry?

Strong partnerships, and a healthy ecosystem of providers, are part of the success equation for CRAs. Cultivating your own provider network that is highly optimized for your specific needs does take full-time management, but it is so worth it. In-sourcing all provider disciplines is a monumental investment. Consolidating everything to a single vendor may also create risk and can hold you hostage to vendor's terms or limited product options.

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One new challenge for CRAs is to recalibrate their view of providers through a new lens of the solutions that are now available. The provider network is transforming beyond the traditional categories of county researchers, nat crim data, scrapers, and CRA platforms. Those lines are blurring, and new provider solutions are emerging to include AI in support of broader CRA functions.

4. How would you describe your company culture?

Our DNA is to be highly innovative, responsive, flexible, and nimble. That means we are partner-success driven. RPA is purely focused on intelligent automation and clients quickly see that we love what we do. We make it our mission to ensure clients maximize efficiency, reduce costs, deliver new products, and create their own unique competitive advantage.

Because we are independent with a singular focus, this enables us to help CRAs, providers, and platforms of all sizes with their own unique processes. We enjoy being part of the ecosystem that protects the public, organizations, and individuals. We thrive on developing powerful automation software, new data products, and being solution oriented.

5. If given the opportunity to communicate one item in front of all attendees at the next PBSA Conference, what would your message be?

Intelligent Automation technologies have advanced rapidly. We encourage CRAs to partner with experts who can help apply these technologies in practical ways. They are already being used effectively to improve data entry, data collection, document processing, identifier extraction, compliance, new products, integration, customer service, profitability, and more.

Don't try to boil the ocean. Start with one jurisdiction, one painful process, or one automation idea and go forward from there. Identifying new products, or providers, that can give you velocity, insights, and lessons learned from the industry. Automation helps you allocate your precious human resources on the most strategic use. Keep moving forward to add the highest possible value to your clients. **I**