



SOCIAL NETWORKING IN THE WORKPLACE AND HOW TO MANAGE IT

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Social networking is something most of us are doing and so are our employees. While many social networking posts are harmless and a bit of fun, increasingly employees are posting information on their Facebook or Twitter pages that can be deemed inappropriate.

There is also the question of productivity. A recent survey suggests that in the UK people spend on average 40 minutes a day on social networking sites, which is costing businesses millions each year.

More and more we are getting calls from employers who have been told about posts on networking sites that are deemed to be inappropriate, and wanting to know how to handle it.

Recently a client was alerted to a message on Facebook that had been posted by an employee. The post was made during working hours and the employee kept adding to the post whenever a friend commented. The post made derogatory remarks about the employee's manager. Thankfully there was a Computer Use policy in place that was very clear about not using social networking sites during work hours and on work computers. The policy was also very clear about what the consequences of the breach may be.

While there is the negative side there can be positives with social networking. Some businesses are using it as a vehicle for information gathering from clients and employees, others are using sites for marketing purposes, and in some areas it has become a workplace tool for accessing information that may not be readily available in another form. Here at Everest Group we even have our own Facebook and Twitter page – purely for marketing purposes of course!

As an employer how can you manage social networking in your work place? You basically have two choices. You can either ban use altogether or you can accept that it happens and manage it.

A total ban is perfectly legitimate for security and viral purposes. Many businesses prefer this option as there is no shades of grey. It enables the business to put blocks in place through their network and mitigates risk.

However if you want to manage use, ensure you have a comprehensive policy in place which outlines the amount of use that is acceptable and when that use can take place, eg meal breaks. The policy should also state that the employee cannot post anything that could be deemed as inappropriate, potentially offensive, derogatory, defamatory or of a bullying or harassing nature and does not discuss confidential company business. The policy needs to be communicated clearly and effectively and employees need to know the consequences of any breach.

As an employer you can't ignore social networking however you can manage it.

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