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Social media policy essential in the workplace

Social media continues to grow with [statistics in Australia](#) showing all platforms increasing. Its emergence has created a vast range of communication opportunities, however, with it comes a blurring of the lines between personal and business communication especially in the workplace and specifically employees using work time to access their social media platforms.

Social media is more extensive than simply having a Facebook account. It involves a spectrum of technologies that include web and mobile technologies including blogging, LinkedIn, text messaging, MSN Messenger and Skype: all Web 2.0 platforms that encourage interactivity.

This may cause disruption in the workplace as employees can become preoccupied with non work-related issues. A [recent survey](#) reveals that some businesses believe that social media is becoming a distraction in the workplace.

In another era, overusing the telephone or using the internet for personal use (in its early days) was frowned upon. However, the prolific use of social media adds another dimension previously not experienced, with decreased productivity a genuine possibility. Employers are, therefore, forced to pay attention and address the issue.

In the past and even currently, it has been common practice to make social media sites inaccessible in the workplace. However, blocking such sites is neither appropriate nor practical. Firstly, Gen Y consider internet and social media access a ‘benefit’ of employment. Secondly, handheld devices make it harder for employers to control usage and thirdly, there will always be distractions at work, whether that be an office chat by the water cooler, or grabbing a coffee from the café next door.

So what is the solution? Balance and common sense is advisable with accessibility to these sites considered important. More significantly, a policy that makes it clear what is acceptable/unacceptable behaviour is vital, and this policy must be communicated to all employees.

No single policy will work for all organisations. Such policies need to be tailored to the culture of the workplace. However, here are some general guidelines when implementing a Social Media Policy:

- Implement a social media policy alongside your internet and email policy.
- Include a definition of social media. With so many platforms your employees need to be aware exactly what you mean when you use the term ‘social media’.
- Include a description of social media behaviour: what is acceptable and what isn’t? For example, when can social media sites be used—during breaks, or is flexibility preferred?
- Make sure employees are aware there is a policy. It should be accessible to them with training of appropriate usage and expectations.
- Will there be any consequences of breaking the social media policy? If so, this must be documented and employees made aware of what will happen.

There is no doubt the use of social media in the workplace has become one of the hottest issues in human resources for a number of years with employers unsure how to adapt.

Social media is part of the dynamic and constantly changing world of communication in the 21st century. A blocking strategy is an overreaction that should be avoided, as employees will resent it. A collaborative approach is more desirable and more in tune with a modern workforce.

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Anna Cairo is the founder of a boutique business (Anna Cairo Consulting) which focuses solely in the online communications domain. She specialises in online copywriting and social media for small business working with clients to increase their social media presence and tailoring services to suit their business needs. Having recently completed her Master of Arts (Media & Communications) which was entirely focused on the online environment, her research and knowledge leaves her well qualified and equipped to deal with the ever changing social media space. She is a writer, researcher and author writing for diverse audiences on a range of topics and you can follow her blog at: <http://www.annacairo.com/blog.html>

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