

Social security

Introduction

Once, 'friends' were people that you met regularly. Friends went to the movies together. Friends may occasionally have had one beer too many and woke up together on a park bench. Sometimes friends were workmates. Sometimes they were actually your significant other's friends. You and your friends drifted apart when you changed jobs (or your significant other).

Today, the world is very, very different. The circle of friends expands and grows. Friends that move away can be 'followed' with social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace. Because of Facebook, I know that a former colleague has just received a kitten called Stitch. A cute cat, but I have not met that colleague in eight years.

Today, people are Facebooked, MySpaced, and LinkedIn. They Flickr and Twitter and Qik. People blog and they YouTube.

Today's workforce talks over the internet in myriad ways, at all times and at all opportunities. The line between 'work' and 'leisure' has become very blurred. Social networking sites can have a real business impact.

Social networking is positive in several ways. For example, searching on a candidate's name will provide more background than a resume ever will. A footprint on the internet will exist somewhere. Potential employers can be better informed about the candidate. The same approach can be used for prospective suppliers of products or services to the business.

Embarrassing photos

Candidates or suppliers with personal photographs in the Facebook group 'embarrassing party photos' may not like this. However, it is not only the young that can have unsavoury photos appear online. At least one Facebook user has shown poor professional judgment by posting a photo of their employer's grey-haired managing director giving a Nazi salute. The poor fellow probably doesn't know it exists.

Companies should tell staff what behaviour and content is appropriate in living out their digital lives.

A scan of blogs and other online tools for qualified candidates expressing frustration about their current job may be helpful when recruiting. Head hunting to fill specialist roles can be much easier in this digital world.

On the other hand though, customers with bad experiences services will likely retell their story on the internet. Today's mobile technologies allow this to occur before the customer has even left the store. Many prospective customers today will perform a search on the business. These customers tend to believe an anonymous internet posting in preference to any information contained in a marketing brochure.

Employees' activities 'out of hours' can also have an impact. The legal liability is

at best murky when an employee stalks another employee using social networking tools. When businesses request employees to put their details on MySpace or Facebook as part of a staff recruitment drive, a legal problem may arise very quickly if an employee is stalked, attacked or has their identity stolen using this information.

Inadvertent leaks

Likewise, LinkedIn is a popular social networking site for professionals. This website provides a 'newsfeed' of the events occurring in your network of contacts. Secrets can be inadvertently given away by staff members setting their LinkedIn status to (for example): 'Micheal Axelsen is developing a proposal for Can-Do Technologies'. LinkedIn also allows a contact to see their contact's contacts, which can give an interesting insight into that contact's marketing activities.

Business should respond in some way. In 2008, the CPA Australia Information Technology & Management Centre of Excellence is writing a guide for business with appropriate policies to adopt for social networking.

At the least, we encourage businesses to understand their 'internet footprint'. A regular search upon the business name, the names of key products, and the senior management team is essential, with Google Alerts a good tool that can alert you to such new content.

Staff should also be aware of the risks and issues for the business and their career when posting information online. At least one Facebook user has been astonished to see photographs of her in an inebriated state. She is desperately trying to get these 'friends of friends' to delete the photographs.

The social networking phenomenon is here to stay and will continue to grow. Businesses should review the impact of social networking on their business. There is a need to communicate to all staff the types of appropriate behaviour and content when living out their digital life. Businesses should monitor their 'internet footprint' and plan a response when the business is mentioned online. 'Banning' social networking is unlikely to be helpful for a company. A sensible and informed approach is important, with an awareness of the potential risks and problems.

Social networking: sometimes, it's about business. And we mean business.



author: *micheal axelsen*
 director
 applied insight pty ltd

telephone: *07 3139 0325*
mobile: *0412 526 375*
email: *micheal.axelsen@appliedinsight.com.au*
web: *www.appliedinsight.com.au*

Micheal's passion is for assisting corporate, government, and SME organisations (including non-profits) to better manage their information systems.