BIZCOMMUNITY

Do your employees understand professional social media?

By Jenny Reid

14 May 2014

You've seen it in the movies. The teenager's parents are out of town, so she decides to throw a house party with just a few friends. Before long, the house is overrun with hundred of strangers - someone's burned the coffee table and there are naked people in the swimming pool.

Social media is a bit like that naïve teen's little get-together. Think of it as an endless online party where everyone is invited, everyone can listen or join in, or watch, at any time. There's a call for partygoers on Twitter, pictures of revelry on Facebook or Tumblr, and dodgy videos on YouTube. It can quickly get out of hand - and land you in hot water.

It happens, again and again

We've seen it happen. In February 2014, Christoff Becker and Frikkie du Toit were sent back to prison after video footage of the two partying in their cell leaked on You Tube. In April, First National Bank was left in a social media scandal after a tweet apparently sent from a FNB Twitter handle responded to a customer's friendly jibe with a highly offensive, racist and tasteless tweet. FNB CEO Jacques Cilliers used the social media platform to apologise but of course the damage was done. A privacy policy or security setting does not mean the site is not sharing this information with third party applications, marketers and recruiters.

Social media allows a business or brand to build and foster a relationship with customers or online communities. Understanding social media, search engine optimisation and analytics is often a key skill employers look for in new recruits in a variety of jobs. Unfortunately, most young people entering the job market have only an unfettered, unfocused, informal - often immature - relationship with social media. For many, it is the communication equivalent of a day at the beach or the mall. For a business owner or HR department, they're looking for respectable social media in a suit and tie.

Your 'stupidities' will have long shadows

The truth is that more and more recruiters are looking into the social media of applicants before hiring them. Unfortunately for the candidate, this is one digital diary that can't be locked or hidden under a pillow. In a recent survey, leading social recruiting system Jobvite discovered that 94% of employers are likely to look at an applicant's social media profile. Employers are inclined to think twice if they find tasteless pictures, references to illegal drugs, bad grammar or swearing on a profile.

Even when a position has been secured within the company, an electronic monitoring policy may track what the employee

is up to on Facebook. In fact, numerous employees have had their contracts terminated as a result of something posted on social media.

Remember that, as an employer, it is not against the law to investigate what a potential or current employee is up to on a social media site. Social media etiquette is not taught in schools, so it might be up to you as an employer to mitigate social media risks and screen employees. Otherwise, it might end up like that teen with her ill-conceived idea for a party with a few friends.

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