

# When your Facebook rant becomes headline news

 By [Marion Scher](#)

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I was out of the country last week when suddenly the biggest story in town was not the forthcoming birthday of Madiba but one based on a Facebook status posted by guys who totally deserve the title of Mamparas of the Century...

The status posted by FHM's feature editor Max Barashenkov read: "I propose correctional [sic] rape and sterilisation for any white person who twerks (dances)."

Adding to this peak of political correctness colleague Montle Moorosi added his comments that "rape can be quite fun if executed in a romantic manner..."

Now don't get me wrong... We've all probably said things we realised instantly or even in retrospect weren't quite 'on' but the point is we didn't post them on Facebook or Tweet them, so a whole load of other people would get peed off by us. One such highly peed-off Facebook follower instantly tweeted these dumb comments to her 500 and something followers who in turn retweeted their considerable followers and so on. Within hours both the electronic and print media had picked up on the story and it was the stuff that talk shows are made of - controversy.

## That 'apology'

What made the situation even worse (if that was possible) for these two young men was the fact that upon being suspended from their jobs at FHM they issued an apology, in which they chose to vaguely apologise for the insensitivity of their remarks but then proceed to have a go at the people who 'invaded their privacy'. Not so much saying sorry for what they said but more sorry for being caught. This then led to the only way Editor, Brendan Cooper could go - to fire them...

So here's the point - how do you keep your comments 'private' on Facebook or Twitter when it's so easy to 'share' or 'retweet'?

As a journalist, Facebook and Twitter have added a new dimension to my research facilities... Now when I Google a name I not only get stories with the people I'm researching involved, I often get their Facebook Page and Twitter tag, which is easy to get on its own. Both of these can tell me so much about a person.

Google also gives me images which often include photos where the person was tagged at a drunken party or with someone they'd rather not be seen with - you can't hide from Google.

**Think about what you want to write... and then don't**

This isn't the first time and won't be the last that Twitter or Facebook has got someone fired as in the case of the former Hawks spokesperson McIntosh Polela as well as model Jessica Leandra dos Santos, winner of the local FHM (there's that name again) Models 2011 competition. And then there are all the other cases of people fired in companies that we don't hear about directly.

So what does this mean to you? It means you can't take for granted that what you say on your Facebook page will stay on your Facebook page or within your Twitter group. And that whenever someone looks you up, perhaps a prospective employer, that's what they're going to find. Your rants or your raves - possibly after a glass or two of wine. Haven't you noticed how the whole tone of Twitter changes after 7pm when tongues and thoughts loosen...?

The thing is once you pressed that hit button it's often too late to take the comment back before someone else has seen it and possibly retweeted it.

Some people take the attitude that they're better off not being on Facebook or Twitter but that's not the answer either. The point is to be circumspect in what you say and whom you say it about. If you want to make racist, feminist, homophobic or other jokes then tell them to your friends who share your tastes - preferably in person - otherwise they may come back to bite you.

## ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher ([www.mediamentors.co.za](http://www.mediamentors.co.za)) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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