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Social Media

What is Social Media?

Social Media is a growing form of communication via the internet through the use of social networks. These social networks started out with sites such as Bebo, MySpace and YouTube and have since then expanded to include Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter. These forms of online communication which were once used for personal social use have since found their place in the professional world and have become both a help and a hindrance to many employers.

The Positive Impacts

In certain industries when a company embraces social media and uses it regularly this can be very successful. For example, a radio station which already operates in the media can enhance its' connection to listeners by also "tweeting" them, or allowing themselves to be "tweeted". Or for companies that don't already work in the media industry, operating with social media can be seen to prove the company is modern and up to date, therefore making it attractive to applicants and customers. Social media can provide a company with a "voice" allowing it to connect more to the world outside itself, and it can also help a company to project more of an image or "brand".

The Risks to Your Company

Unfortunately for the majority of companies social media usage brings more risks, legal issues and negative impacts than it does positive ones. By allowing employees to use social media whilst working you run the risk of employees' regularly wasting working time or being less productive. Employees with access to confidential company information could breach this confidentiality on line, or breach company trust by making defamatory statements about the company, both of which would have a negative effect on the company's reputation. The same can be said not just for your company but the clients you interact with on a daily basis.

Internet bullying and discrimination has been a big problem since the invention of social media, creating a common problem employers have to regularly deal with amongst employees. Employees can also use social media to vent about how much of a bad experience they may or may not have had in your employment, making you seem less desirable to applicants who may see this statement.

Breach of contract, data protection and discrimination are common legal risks experienced by employers and employees in reference to social media.

What Can Be Done?

By having a policy in place that sets out rules on what is and is not acceptable for the use of social media, employers lower the likelihood of having to experience the afore mentioned risks. Any employees who disregard the policy may be subject to disciplinary action, preventing other employees from doing the same.

What you place in your policy is up to you. Most employers choose to have a complete ban on any use of social media during working hours. This is an attempt to completely avoid any and all problems caused by it with the most important being time wasting. Other employers who have more trust in their employees or who want to appear more relaxed may permit limited access on lunch breaks etc. Some employers who allow employees limited personal use to their mobile phones at any time of the day also choose to allow employees the same level of access to social media, only stepping in when they feel this access is being abused. Many employers will also have a rule in place stating that employees are not allowed to reference their employer on their personal social media accounts.

It should be noted that whilst it is very important to monitor and act upon any misuse regarding social media, an isolated comment about a bad day at work should be seen in the context in which it was made. Having a highly interventionist approach to employees' personal lives, or "ruling with the iron fist" can damage relations with the work force.

How We Can Help

We can help your company by providing you with the correct policies and procedures. We can also help you with your implementation of them to make sure any transition goes smoothly, and advise you what to do if said policies are ignored.

If you have any queries relating to any of the subjects raised within this newsletter then please don't hesitate to contact us at hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk

For clarification of any of the above updates or for advice and guidance on any HR and/or Health and Safety Concerns contact us by emailing hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk or by calling 02476 664092.

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