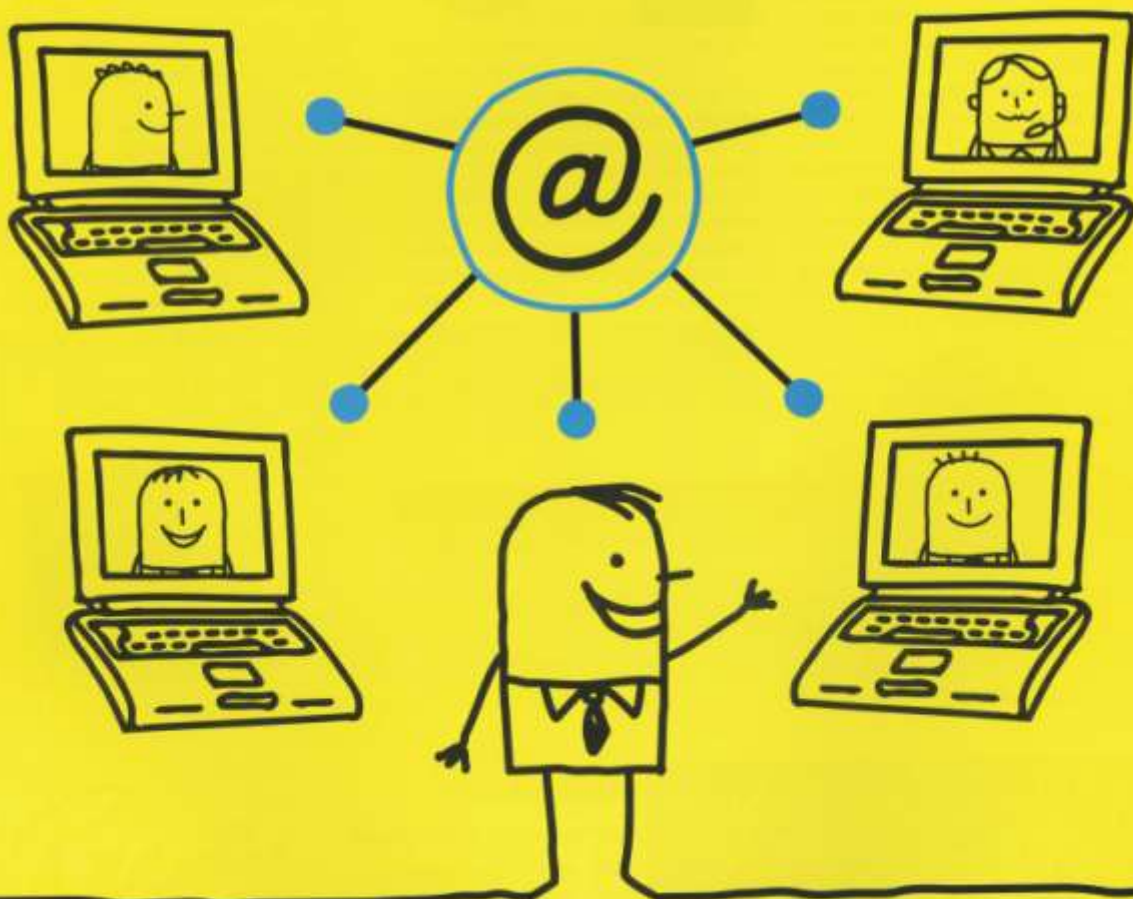


RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn. These social-networking giants have brought joy to the world. But for some offices, they have brought pain.

Lisa Cheong reveals the fine line between productive browsing and maddening distraction, and the beneficial ways that businesses are incorporating social media platforms into everyday work.



It all started with what an employee thought was a seemingly innocuous video. Taken during the company's dinner and dance function early in February this year, the Singapore-based employee thought that such a harmless video would be perfectly fine for sharing with other people on video-sharing website YouTube. Right?

The employee thought wrong. Apparently, the company saw fit to dismiss the employee, citing a "breach the company's policy". Taking his grievances to the local forum STOMP, the dismissed employee shot back, saying: "The action taken was too harsh and there was no such policy explicitly made known to all the employees beforehand."

This soon paved the way for headlines in local news media such as "Posting office video? Think again" and "Fired for posting office video".

In recent years, as social networking sites and content-sharing sites such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter emerged on the internet, bringing situations such as the one above to light. As a result, employers and fellow HR practitioners are now weighing up the implications of such sites on their workforce.



Mapleston

With the influx of Generation Y employees into the workplace, these tech-saavy employees are changing the way companies communicate internally. Just ask Craig Mapleston of iris Singapore. As the managing director of a marketing and advertising agency, Mapleston

says he has staff who haven't really known any other way of PC-based communication other than through social channels. "They have led the way with the rest of the workforce in adopting social media to stay in touch and share information that is relevant not just to their personal lives, but also to work," Mapleston says, adding that 90% of his 60-strong headcount are between the ages of 22 and 35.

And as the head of a creative agency, Mapleston says it is an imperative for iris's employees to stay on top of the changing consumer landscape and social trends. Through the use of social media, geographic barriers aren't as limiting as they used to be - allowing a faster immediacy of sharing information in the workplace and connecting people.

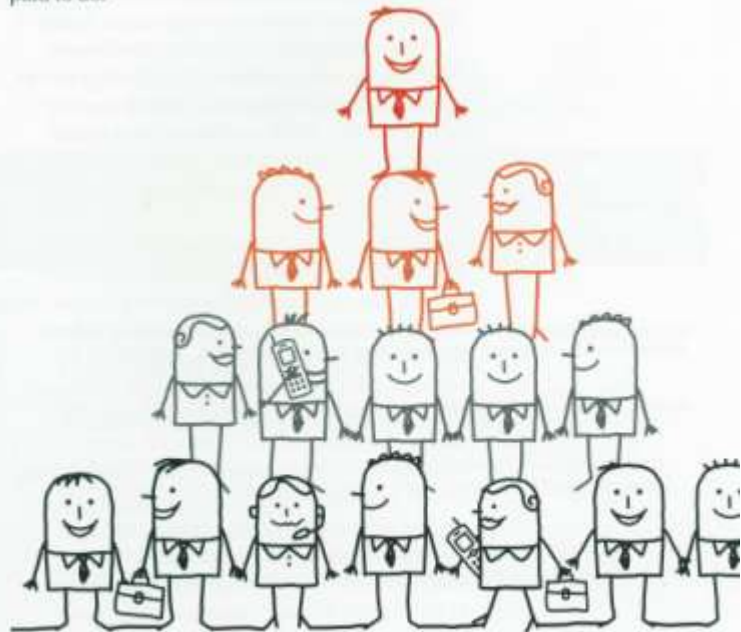
"As a communications agency, we need to

stay on top of what's hot and what's interesting consumers. This is not just funny videos on YouTube, but best practices in advertising, relevant presentations, talks and case studies. Social networks are also an enabler for them to stay up to date on the zeitgeist." He adds that all employees have a responsibility within the agency to share what they think is relevant to their clients.

For IBMers, staying "plugged in" is easy with the wide variety of tools and platforms which the company provides its employees. Going beyond the basic Lotus offerings, the company also has BluePages, which is a resource similar to LinkedIn. As part of the organisation's intranet, BluePages allows IBMers to find information such as contacts of colleagues or subject experts. The company also has a BlogCentral, where all the internal blogs are held and where employees can create their own blogs as well.

The worries

Social media websites raise several workplace-related concerns. Productivity, for one, is an issue which many bosses and HR practitioners fret over. As the conventional wisdom goes, if employees are spending their working hours watching YouTube videos or surfing Facebook, then surely they won't be doing what they were paid to do.



Controlled, permitted use of social media sites in the workplace can build trust among employees.

COVER STORY » Social media in the workplace



Social media allows employees to express themselves freely on the web.

When it comes to worrying about whether social media platforms hamper productivity, various employers have taken different steps in their responses to this concern.

There are employers, such as recruitment firm Adecco, which believes in restricting access for their employees to prevent any loss in productivity. While employees have access to video sites such as Vimeo, many employees do not have access to sites such as Facebook or YouTube.

But there are exceptions, says Jessica Chew, marketing and communications executive for Adecco Singapore and Malaysia. For example, the website restrictions are eased for recruiters who work in the advertising and creative industry, which networks online a lot. Likewise, the marketing team also has access to social media platforms, as part of their job scope involves updating content for their website's blog as well as posting new job updates for clients.

Iris, on the other hand, chooses not to provide its employees with any guidelines on social media usage. Citing trust in employees as the biggest reason, Mapleston says: "You can't and you shouldn't regulate or legislate how [employees] talk. If you try to introduce a type of

censorship, it creates the feeling of oppression, dampens enthusiasm and ultimately creativity." And in an industry where ideas are the lifeblood of the business, restrictions could ultimately prove to be counter-productive to the business. "In our experience, social media in the workplace is entirely positive and additive - it's part of the culture here and to police it in any way would not only create an artificial environment but would be detrimental to business."



Faulkner

As for employees at Big Blue, George Faulkner, manager of marketing and communications of IBM's Social Computing division, says the company does provide a set of social computing guidelines for its employees. From what began as blogging guidelines

in 2005, this has now evolved to include all social computing activities, says Faulkner. In addition, IBMers all sign business conduct guidelines every year which, together with the company's values, forms the foundation of how IBMers approach everything that they do. "These guidelines are not simply to be followed

during business hours, but state that they are to be followed when a self-identified IBMer is participating online at all times. There is trust at the core of these guidelines, as there is an acknowledgement of personal responsibility," Faulkner says.

While Faulkner does admit that there is always a danger for every organisation that an employee may not be using all their work-related time in a productive manner, he says that this issue goes "far beyond the digital realm".

"This is a cultural challenge in my opinion, a risk you face taking on any employee, not one based on the allure of some new way to avoid your assigned business tasks at hand."

Instead, Faulkner says IBM chooses to educate and raise awareness for employees on how they can manage social computing to advance their work and productivity through new collaboration tools the company provides.

"Because we have so many successful practitioners in this space at IBM, employees can find examples very quickly of how powerful this can be when done well."

Social networking done well

So what are some ways HR practitioners can incorporate social media platforms into their HR or company processes?

Recruitment: One of the biggest benefits companies can derive from engaging in social media platforms is in finding talent, says Chew.

"One of the most lucrative platforms we are using is LinkedIn. It's an excellent platform for identifying top talent, especially for managerial or hard-to-fill positions."

Furthermore, Chew adds that being engaged on a social media platform can boost the employer brand as well. While corporate websites are a dime a dozen, being engaged on a social media platform can help position the company as one that is in touch with current trends.

IBM also uses Twitter to post job opportunities online as well as to create talent communities around specific areas of business. Faulkner adds that the company also uses LinkedIn for direct recruitment as well.

Keeping in touch with ex-employees: Through an organisation called The Greater IBM Connection, LinkedIn provides a space where "hundreds of thousands" of IBMers are listed and have classed themselves as past and present employees, which Faulkner says is a popular and robust platform for business communications.

Improve employee collaboration and work productivity: With IBM's Innovation Jam, the social tool is geared towards enabling an online exchange of ideas which Faulkner says aims at solving organisational and global challenges with a "crowd-sourcing methodology".

Since the first World Jam in 2001, these events focused on finding ways to increase

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collaboration, innovation, social engagement and responsiveness to change within organisations, says Faulkner, and has even invited thought leaders, executives, clients, partners and alumni to tinker with its technologies in pursuit of new ideas.

"To prepare those invited to participate, the company built an interactive website that includes sound clips, virtual guided tours, and video snippets with background information. Participants contribute to the main theme areas utilising a standard suite of Enterprise and Web 2.0 tools including wiki, chat, live conferences and other collaboration tools," he adds.

Employee training: In a time when training budgets are becoming increasingly stretched,

companies are now finding training through social media sites to be cost-effective. For instance, IBM relies on podcasts and videos which are hosted on social platforms, as well as have online communities organised for certain subjects. "We do a great deal of training through wikis, so that any number of experts on a particular subject can share information and create repositories of deep experience and knowledge for any and all to mine," Faulkner says.

Like it or not, social media networks and platforms are impacting the way companies operate and it is now up to HR practitioners and employers to understand how they can embrace the change or resist it.

According to Mapleston, one of the biggest benefits to come from such platforms is the

BUILDING TEAMS THROUGH FACEBOOK



Wong

When Mark Zuckerberg started Facebook, little would he have thought that it would one day be used by a banking organisation in Singapore to foster bonds among team members – such as the case of OCBC's Emerging Business (EmB) unit.

Wong Chung Yee, vice president for enterprise banking at OCBC Bank, says that before the unit started its official EmB Facebook account, many of the unit's 200 members had already taken the initiative to set up Facebook accounts for their respective teams.

It helped that many colleagues were already Facebook-savvy and equipped with smart phones which made it easy to network on the go. So when the official EmB Facebook account finally launched in December, Wong says it created some buzz and excitement among colleagues who see it as a platform to better connect and socialise with one another. Now, 70% of the 200-member team are members of the unit's Facebook page.

"Such social interaction helped to build stronger bonds between our colleagues and generated greater synergy amongst the respective teams," says Wong.

The idea of having an official Facebook account was even supported by the head of the EmB unit, who Wong says is now an active user of it. "Today, all our colleagues have come to treat him as a friend they can turn to for advice and help in both the 'real' and 'virtual' EmB community."

Having a culture that promotes social bonds between colleagues also helps ensure that the community does not languish. Wong says

the EmB unit's culture of viewing colleagues as friends first rather than colleagues has helped popularise the platform as a communication channel among them.

And contrary to popular belief that only younger-generation members are more suited to social networking, Wong says the opposite is true. While baby boomers only comprise 5% of the EmB unit, they now make up 15% of the Facebook account's population. Although the number of baby boomers trails behind the Gen Y users by 60%, Wong says these numbers show that the platform is a useful tool for colleagues of different age groups to connect and socialise.

While companies may use Facebook to discuss company business and other work-related issues, OCBC chooses to keep things purely social. Through the EmB account, members upload photos and information about themselves, which Wong says helps to create a more personal dimension for employees to break between the ranks and get to know each other better.

"For example, our managers will post encouraging comments to the group when they

read postings that relate to a staff's bumpy day at work. This shows that the manager cares about their team members' well-being, and makes the members feel appreciated and happy to be associated with the team."

As a result of the Facebook account, Wong says the EmB unit has become more closely knit, adding that there are instances whereby people find it hard to leave the organisation due to the close bonds forged.

"We also have baby boomers and Gen-X managers who participate even more actively in the Facebook group than our Gen-Y colleagues," Wong says, adding that this helps create synergy within a diverse team. "When a diverse team works well together, the company benefits."



Can companies use Facebook to build stronger teams?



The benefits of social-media platforms greatly outweigh the risks.

opening up of dialogue and the frequency of it as employees can now share information with each other "in real time".

As for Faulkner, he says his work has improved, as he can now find answers, experts and information faster than before. "And when IBMers publish hot new materials of interest, the


"If managed properly, there will always be an advantage to using social-media platforms than not using them."

Jessica Chew, marketing and communications executive, Adxxco Singapore and Malaysia

people I follow spread it like wildfire and I am connected with it instantly."

At IBM, employees no longer rely on outdated modes of communication such as email, telephone or snail mail, says Faulkner. Instead, most communication is now done in the open and in places where others can add to and enhance the information - thus making it more powerful and factual.

As Chew does not deny that employee time management may crop up as an issue for employees who may spend too much time on worksites, she says it all boils down to managing employees rather than rejecting such platforms altogether.

"If managed properly, there will always be an advantage to using social media platforms than not using them," she says. 



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