

Importance of Internet Usage Policies

For technology professionals, the Internet is an indispensable resource. However, the line can become blurred between what activities constitute personal use or inappropriate online behaviour. Not having an enforceable usage policy can create significant liability issues for a company, not to mention diminished productivity resulting from personal business being conducted on company time and equipment. Therefore, it is essential for employers to have clear, specific Internet usage policies that are widely communicated and consistently enforced.

Legal Liability

Because the company owns the computers that employees work on, the company can legally be held liable for any illegal or discriminatory content that employees view or distribute on those computers.

Discrimination/Harassment

One concern is discrimination and sexual harassment. This can result from an employee sending inappropriate or offensive emails or from an employee viewing pornography, other sexually explicit material or content that promotes hate and discrimination. Even

if the individual is not distributing inappropriate content, an employee walking by could be offended and take issue with the company, or even sue, for being subjected to a hostile work environment.

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Illicit Activity

Another legal liability for employers is any computer activity that involves or leads to illegal activity. This can include accessing illegal information, participating in illegal activities online or using information found online to commit a crime. In addition, child pornography is of particular concern for employers, both because of the severity of the crime and because studies show that many people who view such content do so during work hours.

In any of the above cases, even if the employer was unaware of the inappropriate

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or illegal activity, it can be held liable for negligent supervision of employees.

Misuse of Company Email

Another type of legal liability could result from improper use of company email. For example, if an employee sends personal email from his or her company account or uses his or her company email address to identify themselves in a chat room or on a website, then the company could be liable for any statements made or actions performed. This could bring up issues of defamation, discrimination or links to illegal activity simply by the employee misusing a company email account.

Technological Risks

Accessing unauthorised Web pages can also pose risks to the company's computer or network. Just one click of the mouse can expose a computer to a destructive virus or allow a hacker to access sensitive company information.

Loss of Productivity

Studies have revealed that employees often spend large amounts of time 'surfing' the Web or conducting personal business on the computer during work hours. While incidental personal use is understandable, more than that can be a significant drain on your company's resources by paying employees who are not consistently working.

Costs of Liability

There can be significant costs associated with claims of computer or Internet abuse by employees. Legal actions and settlements can be extremely costly to the company, whether it is for discrimination, harassment or illicit activity. In addition, dismissing employees guilty of misconduct can be expensive and time-consuming, both in finding and training a replacement and in potential legal fees if there is litigation. Prevent these issues by contacting **Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd** to help create an effective Internet usage policy for your company.

