

The Risks and Benefits of Social Networking

Social networking is not just for youths anymore. And it's not just for personal use and staying in contact with old friends. It can help your company better connect with clients and customers. It is also a great way to recruit candidates for jobs at your company. While the thought of implementing social networking may evoke feelings of trepidation in the minds of employers, this popular trend has the potential to change the way companies across the globe do business.

Social networking has the ability to get your message across to thousands of people very quickly, which makes it a priceless public relations and viral marketing tool. However, popular social networking sites, such as Facebook®, MySpace® and Twitter®, can present a significant hazard to your company and its reputation, depending on how you and your employees use them.

Industry leaders are constantly recommending social networking sites as places to advertise, and as tools to interact and connect with current and future customers. But not all publicity is good publicity. It is important to project a positive company image, which you can do through setting up your own social networking account; but it is just as imperative that you control other users' conversations about you.

Do You Know Who's Talking About You Online?

Facebook, the largest social networking site today based on monthly unique visitors, has over 1 billion active users. According to Facebook's user statistics, the fastest-growing group of users is people age 35 and older, which means it is becoming increasingly likely that your workforce is getting involved with social networking. While this has many potential benefits,

you also want to be careful no one — whether it is a competitor or former or current employee — is tarnishing your company's name or reputation. The same holds true for blogs, where damaging content may appear without your consent.

Social networking not only helps your company connect with clients and customers, it is also a very valuable resource for drawing in potential employees and recruiting the finest candidates for jobs.

The key to keeping your risk low is identity management. The best way to prevent Internet buzz from becoming a hazard is to monitor the use of your company name. Periodically type it into a search engine and make sure that your official website is the top hit and that nothing offensive comes up in the first 20 hits, which is statistically as far as most people will dig in a search.

If you do find references to your company name in the first 20 hits that could be hazardous to your business or your reputation, you have a few options. If social networking sites are the culprit, consider enacting a policy prohibiting employees from mentioning the company name on their personal sites. Explain the negative outcomes this could have for business and help employees understand how acting as poor representation of the company through scandalous

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photos or negative comments on a social networking site could affect them directly.

Negative Comments – What to Do

If negative or derogatory comments about your company have seeped into other sites outside the control of your employees, however, the risk to your business is even greater. What's more, this type of hazardous publicity is more difficult to manage. One approach is to flood the Internet with positive information about your company so that the negative write-ups are no longer within the top search results. Contacting sites and asking them to remove fictitious and defamatory material is another option.

If you have a serious public relations issue and your company's reputation or legitimacy is on the line because of material on the Internet or social networking sites, it could cost you thousands of pounds in lost business. Consider hiring an identity management company, which will help organise, analyse and control the information about you that appears on the Internet.

Using Social Networks to Filter Applicants

The practice of using social networking sites to further research potential employees and weed out candidates based on content in these sites is risky. By using social networking sites as a filtering tool, you are exposing yourself to potential legal actions. Many users post personal information such as their religion and age. Even if you decide not to hire them for legal reasons, such as improper educational qualifications, the candidate could accuse you of basing the decision not to hire on information obtained from their social networking site.

When it comes to looking on the Internet for information on potential job candidates, you should consider talking with your co-workers to come to the best solution. There is no right or wrong answer regarding whether Internet research on candidates is a good idea, so it is up to your company to weigh the options. Whatever you choose, remember to examine the underlying risks and consider all feasible scenarios

and outcomes to make the most informed decision possible.

Please contact **Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd** for more information about this increasingly popular trend.



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