

Understanding social media risks

Social media is an ever increasing form of communication for many people in both their personal and professional lives. It presents people with many benefits in allowing them to communicate a variety of messages to many people with great speed and efficiency. However, those benefits need to be balanced with the many risks social media presents.

Social media is a very broad term which includes any websites and applications which allow users to interact with other people as well as create or share information (text, photos, videos etc.).

There are endless examples where people appear to have not stopped and thought before they've posted on social media. Poorly considered social media posts can and do affect the personal and professional reputation and image of individuals as well as a businesses; even if the post isn't directly related to a business.

The following tips will assist individuals and businesses manage their risks when using social media.

Have a business plan for how and why social media is to be used

When deciding whether or not to create a business social media presence, it's very easy to think 'if everyone else is doing it, so should I'. However there needs to be greater thought put into this decision. The decision to use social media should be well thought out and based on a company's needs and business plans; the benefits and risks need to be considered.

Business social media should be based on business requirements, not personal views

Business owners and managers need to be sure that when they make a decision on whether to use social media for their business, this decision is based on the needs of the organisation, not the owner's/manager's personal views of social

media. For example, a person who chooses to not use Twitter for personal use may still decide it's a great tool for them professionally. Business decisions and personal decisions regarding social media use should be separated.

Create clear business guidelines and processes regarding who is able to post on social media and how this is to be done

Due to the risks associated with social media interactions, it's very important that businesses have a clear process for who is responsible for posting on social media. The person undertaking this role needs to understand when social media is an appropriate form of communication and what sort of messages are to be shared using social media. This process should also provide guidance on how often social media is monitored and responded to and how to respond to negative comments.

Consider training for those staff responsible for social media

It's often assumed that young people are well versed in social media use however this isn't always the case. Also, not all users of social media understand appropriate business use and its associated risks. Therefore it's worth considering training in social media communications and its risks for the responsible staff members.

Understand the social media site you're using

There's a wide variety of social media sites available to businesses, all providing similar yet different benefits. When a business is using any of these sites, it's very important they understand the various functions within that site. Not fully understanding how a site works is going to increase the risks of using it.



Consider what messages should be shared using social media

All businesses have various ways in which they communicate with their customers and clients. Social media is generally designed for short sharp messages, yet not all information suits this style of communication. When businesses are communicating with their customers, they need to carefully consider how that particular message should be shared.

Carefully consider the implications of engaging with clients on social media

Professionals and businesses should consider if social media is an appropriate forum for them to be communicating with clients, both through business or personal accounts. Engagement through personal accounts can blur professional boundaries. When using business accounts, some conversations may not suit social media, especially if the conversation appears in a public setting. It's important to consider what conversations are best had away from social media and when to take a discussion off line.

Understand that you can no longer separate personal and professional use

Unfortunately many people hold a view that what they write within a personal social media account in their own time will have no bearing or impact on them professionally. However this is not the case. Whether fair or not, professionals are always representing

their profession and professional self; personal social media posts can be considered to be representing a professional view. Therefore the professional impact needs to be considered before any personal post is made.

Don't believe that any post is ever private

Too often people post information on social media which they intended to remain private and not be seen widely. However social media can never truly be private. Many online groups claim to be private and state that members require approval. However non-approved users don't need to be particularly savvy to access these groups and then share or copy information being posted. Professionals need to remember that if they don't want their colleagues, clients or competitors seeing a social media post, it should never be posted on either personal or business accounts.

Never post in haste, all posts need to be carefully considered

As mentioned earlier, social media is designed for quick short messages to be shared widely. This means social media can encourage messages to be shared with little thought or planning which on occasions leads to poorly worded messages which are easily misinterpreted. It's important to pause and think through a message before it's shared.