

NO STOPPING SOCIAL MEDIA
Firms may ban staff from using Facebook and Twitter on the job, but research shows online interaction can bring great benefits. **B3**

TECHNOLOGY

No stopping social media

While some companies ban employees from using Facebook or Twitter at work, research shows online interaction can bring great benefits, writes **Vilaporn Taweelappontong**

Organisations have embraced social media for tasks such as marketing, product design and recruiting. Many have found that social media can increase productivity, spark innovation and create a more collaborative corporate community. However, social media are not only a forum for new or expanded marketing strategies. The use of social media in the workplace also has its benefits.

The UK's largest telecoms company, British Telecom (BT), views social media as a way to equip its people with the information needed to excel in a fast-changing and competitive marketplace.

BT has implemented Dare2Share, an internal YouTube-style podcasting platform where employees can create and upload short learning nuggets to colleagues in video or audio format.

Dare2Share allows employees to learn from each other by rapidly capturing and spreading learning throughout the organisation in the form of podcasts, discussion threads, blogs,



Many companies object to allowing staff to use social networks during working hours, but they could be rewarded by being generous. PATTARAPONG CHATPATTARASILL

RSS feeds and other knowledge assets (documents, courses and portals).

The result of this podcast delivery is a reduction in briefing time of two hours, a reduction of two days' delivery effort and four days' travel time for each trainer (and elimination of travel costs), with a total 12.5 hours saved by not having to constantly repeat the same information.

While social media help transform BT's internal communications system and ensure greater accountability among employees, BT's employees themselves find that social media make their lives easier.

McDonald's is another company already using social media to engage employees. The company has set up Station M, a private networking site for its more than 650,000 hourly employees in the US and Canada. The company sees the site as an important way to reach out to entry-level employees and learn what's on their minds.

More importantly, millennial generation employees (also known as Generation Y or Echo Boomers) say using social media makes them feel better about the company. If these employees spread that positive message through their own social networks, the impact could be far-reaching indeed. After all, every employee who tweets or posts on a blog can be perceived as a spokesperson for the company.

The benefits of allowing employees access to social networks at the workplace include:

- ◆ access to information and solutions to problems
- ◆ a medium of sharing knowledge and information between employees, suppliers and customers
- ◆ a basis for better team building and internal structure in the workplace.

However, many companies have concerns about social media distracting employees during working hours and have blocked social media access at the workplace for the following reasons:

- ◆ potential exposure of the company's computers and network to viruses and spyware
- ◆ loss in productivity affecting the bottom line
- ◆ reduction of available bandwidth for the business
- ◆ legal liability
- ◆ potential leakage of sensitive company information.

While these may be legitimate worries, it might not make sense to attempt to block employees' access to social media at work. After all, they can still use their phones to access Facebook, and they still can text and email.

There's no stopping social media. A recent Nielsen survey found that 80% of active internet users spend time — a lot of time — on social networking sites. In fact, use of social media and blogs accounts for 23% of all time online; three times the amount of time spent using email (7.6%).

Use of social media is not confined to off-duty hours, however. As the research institute Ponemon has noted, 60% of social media users visit sites such as Facebook and Twitter for non-business purposes for at least 30 minutes per day while at work.

Of course, the use of social media in the workplace has its benefits and has become the preferred channel of communication.

Outside the workplace, social networking can help a business reach and engage customers, improve the customer experience, help develop new products and services, and polish the brand image of the business.

Many businesses today patrol sites such as Twitter and Facebook to listen in on the chatter about their products and services. Should the conversation turn negative, the company can use the same medium to respond and move the discussion in the right direction.

As risks associated with social networking escalate, businesses must take extraordinary care to craft an inte-

grated security strategy that balances employee education with sophisticated network monitoring and data protection technology.

This initiative will require a close partnership between the business and information technology groups.

Effective security for social networking requires that organisations fuse education and behavioural change of employees with robust technology that constantly monitors for risks.

Clearly, enterprise social media tools can benefit businesses in many ways. However, the inherent risks of social networking can also be very bad for business. Implementing a proactive security strategy that creates effective user policies, educating employees on the acceptable use of social media, having a security strategy and policies in place are essential to protect the companies and brands.

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