



How to Manage Social Media in the Workplace

Expert View - By Dominic Smith



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How to Manage Social Media in the Workplace

The use of social media is ascending at an alarming pace. From sporadic updates on the move to extensive hours spent scrolling, social media consumes a significant amount of our time.

This white paper is created for employers, and comprises how to handle situations surrounding social media from recruitment to retirement, including insightful research, case studies, and best advice.

Social media has already posed an issue for thousands of employers, with incidents involving defamation, cyber bullying, freedom of speech, and invasion of privacy occurring on a regular basis.

The eclipse of social media is showing no signs of halting anytime soon, with 82% (41.8 million) of adults using the internet in 2016. This, compared with only 35% (16.2 million) in 2006, illustrates the staggering growth of the platform.

It was also found that, in 2016, 70% of adults accessed the internet 'on the go' using a mobile phone or smartphone, up from 66% in 2015 and nearly double the 2011 estimate of 36%.

Social media has played a big part in moulding HR over the last few years, with new policies, procedures and risks to consider and put proactive measures in place for.

Over the past decade especially, the likes of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other platforms have also distorted the boundaries between home and work. Often, incidents relating to social media are clouded with ambiguity, as very fine lines separate free speech and public statements which could be detrimental for a business.

Our comments and research within this report are intended as a guide for employers, though it is essential for any employment law or HR incident to be treated on a case by case basis. For further advice or guidance on your matter, please contact **0800 032 4088**.

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About The Author

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Having worked for two leading Employment Consultancies in the UK, Dominic specialises in HR and employee relations across a range of sectors from SME's to medium sized businesses. Prior to working in HR, Dominic worked as a paralegal for the Crown Prosecution Service.

1. ONS: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2016>

Recruitment

Since the digital age, a majority of employers are now recruiting via online platforms. Other than a company's own website or an external recruitment agency's, companies of all sizes are now utilising social media channels to showcase available roles and opportunities, particularly Facebook and LinkedIn.

Though traditional methods still take precedence when recruiting (with 49% of employers preferring to use a recruitment consultant than any other method), there are plenty of advantages for an employer to use social media to attract applicants.

This affordable alternative to traditional methods allows employers to specifically target and attract candidates, while simultaneously promoting company branding and internal growth.

Many argue that the potential projection of social media posts is unrivalled, with the ability of contacts 'sharing' posts to reach a mass audience. In January 2017, the average reach of a Facebook post climbed to 8.92%.

A key consideration for employers during the recruitment process is their own and their employees' social media channels. When preparing for an interview, many candidates will make use of social media to research an organisation, their culture, career opportunities, and profiles of existing employees.

With this in mind, it is extremely important for employers to convey the correct messages via their social media platforms, which represent the vision and values of the organisation.

A survey by Robert Walters found that while 76% of candidates look to discover generic information on the company and its operations, over two thirds (67%) also look for pointers on cultural values, and around half expect details of future strategy. The survey also found that just over half of respondents viewed the profiles of existing staff members, while 54% looked to discover more about the opportunities for career progression on the social media sites.

2. Robert Walters: <https://www.robertwalters.com/content/dam/robert-walters/corporate/news-and-pr/files/whitepapers/using-social-media-in-the-recruitment-process.pdf>
3. Meet Edgar: <https://meetedar.com/blog/how-to-find-out-if-you-have-good-facebook-reach-2/>
4. Robert Walters: <https://www.robertwalters.com/content/dam/robert-walters/corporate/news-and-pr/files/whitepapers/using-social-media-in-the-recruitment-process.pdf>

While there are clearly benefits of employers using social media, there are also pitfalls if not used correctly.

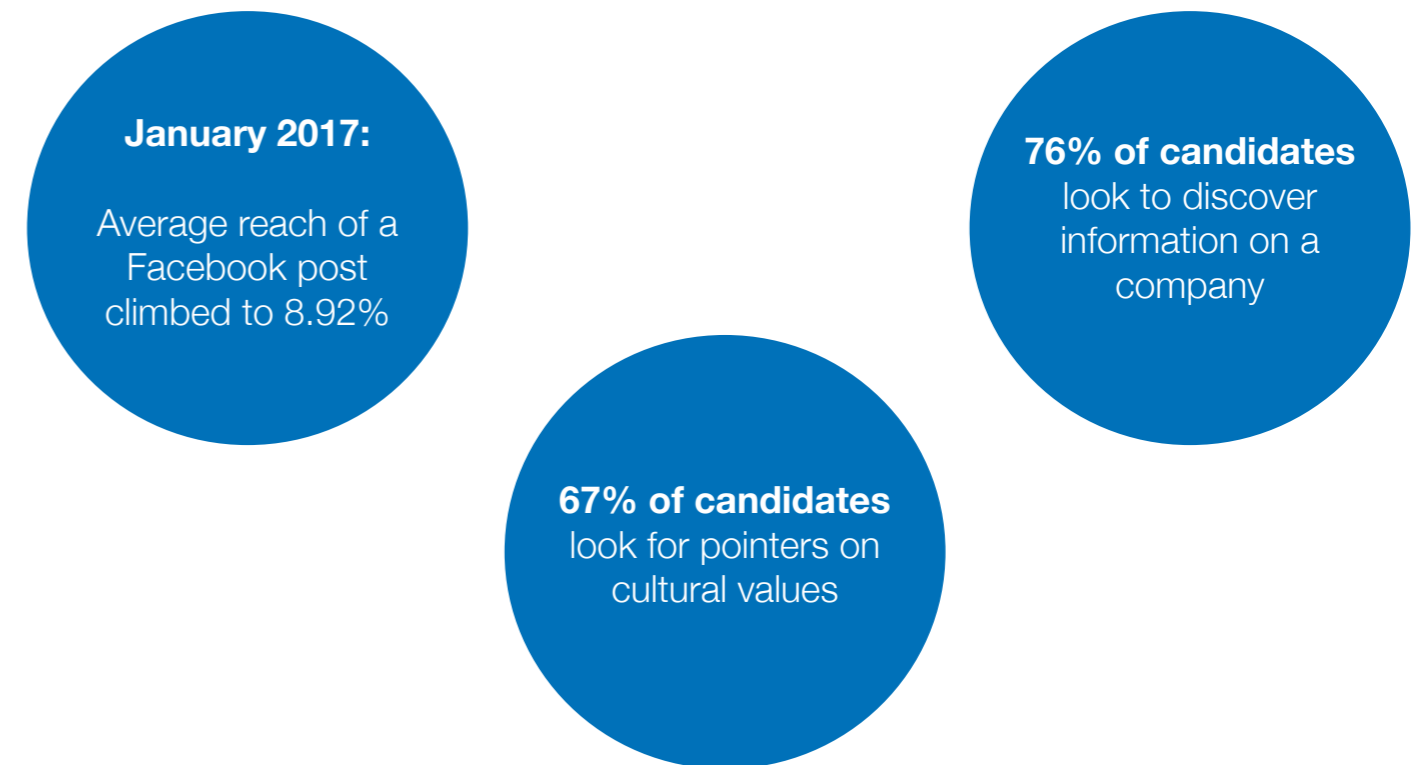
As aforementioned, the projection of social media platforms is unrivalled. But if we take into consideration negative publicity, this concept adopts an entirely different meaning.

Should there be any inaccuracy, negative connotations, or poor feedback associated with a post, an employer can struggle to implement an effective means of damage control.

A recent example to draw upon to illustrate how unpredictable and damaging social media activity can be is the #WalkersWave campaign. The renowned brand launched a social media campaign which encouraged people to share selfies to win tickets for the Champion's League final. Their campaign was hijacked by consumers, and instead of uploading selfies, people sent pictures of notorious killers and sex offenders.

Employers should consider the best method of communication for their organisation, but also put the appropriate processes and precautions in place to manage or counteract any negative impact.

In addition, while this method of recruitment will cast a wide net, it does also put people who do not use social media at a disadvantage which gives rise to the possibility of discrimination due to a protected characteristic.



Communication with Employees

Social media has worked its way to form an integral part of how individuals and organisations now communicate.

The platforms have revolutionised the way that society communicates, with organisations communicating with their employees and clients alike.

Larger organisations have been known to develop their own internal social media platforms or forums to facilitate two way communication with their staff. However, smaller business too can find social media a useful tool to keep employees informed.

In communicating with employees, employers should consider:



Communication with Employees: Virgin Media & Social Media

Virgin Media are an organisation very much focused on giving their employees a voice. To enable this, they utilise various social media channels within the organisation. Here is an example of how implementing and using social media can be beneficial in the workplace.

During a social media conference Helen Farrar, Head of Internal Communications at Virgin Media, gave examples of the six channels they use to encourage communication.

The six channels are:

- 1. Intranet:** This is the main online channel used internally to communicate
- 2. "The Grill":** A live online web chat, where anyone in the business can ask the individual getting 'grilled' questions.
- 3. Forums:** Have proved effective for Virgin Media as they invoke different responses and conversations from different people across the business.
- 4. Wiki's:** Information wiki's across the business. They have grown into their own micro communities, as individual sections of the business build up their own 'local' knowledge communities.
- 5. Twitter:** They have a 'locked account' (they simply protect their tweets) called @VMGrapvine that currently has 430+ people in their online community.
- 6. Blogs:** They currently have 25 blogs being written within the organisation on a wide range of subjects. They actively encourage anyone to blog and share them within the Virgin Media network.

Helen believes there have been five real benefits from using the multitude of channels as part of their communication strategy:

- 1.** Real-time feedback on real-time communications
- 2.** Reach out to diverse cultures
- 3.** Moved away from being an information 'top-down' company, by instigating 'bottom-up' communication channels.
- 4.** Options for communicating with other employees, and how they share information with each other.
- 5.** Their employees are now taking responsibility for their own communications and information which they are sharing with one another.

5. Sirona Consulting: <http://sironaconsulting.com/2010/03/case-study-of-how-virgin-media-use-social-media-as-a-key-part-of-their-internal-communications-strat/>

Conduct

Every individual deals with frustration in the workplace differently. In some cases, venting frustration offers the best form of stress relief for employees.

Employees venting frustration can be particularly problematic for employers, especially where social media is concerned. The main danger for employers is for comments to be expressed in relation to an organisation, and intentionally or unintentionally causing damage to a brand.

In considering what action to take, an employer should consider six key factors:

The nature of what has been said

The likely audience of the subject matter

Does the individual identify as an employee of the organisation

The likely reputational damage

The employee's intentions

The employer's social media policy and training

Case Study

Incident

An employee of a nursing home held three years of service as a carer. One day, on her Facebook page, the employee had posted: "What a useless day. Residents' lives being put at risk, not evacuated when fire alarm goes off, what a joke."

The employee's Facebook account could be viewed publically, which meant that family members of residents had seen the post and brought it to the employer's attention, as had other members of staff.

Furthermore, the employee stated that she worked for the employer on her profile page. The employee was fully aware that the fire alarms were triggered by a fire alarm company who were carrying out maintenance work on faulty sensors and that residents were never in any danger. The employer wanted to dismiss.

The Employer's Social Media Policy:

In this case, the employer's social media policy stated:

Your responsibilities: "Social networking sites and blogs offer a useful means of keeping in touch with friends and colleagues, and they can be used to exchange views and thoughts on shared interests, both personal and work-related. The Company does not object to you setting up personal accounts on social networking sites or blogs on the internet, in your own time and using your own computer systems. However, you must not do so on Company media or in work time.

You must not link your personal social networking accounts or blogs to the Company's website. Any such links require the Company's prior consent. You must not disclose Company secrets, breach copyright, defame the Company or its clients, suppliers, customers or employees, or disclose personal data or information about any individual that could breach the Data Protection Act 1998 on your blog or on your social networking site."

Was it Safe to Dismiss?

Despite there being clear evidence that the employee's concerns were not based on a reasonable belief and of reputational damage to the employer, a dismissal may well have been unfair as there was no indication that an employee may be dismissed for breach of the policy.

Further Cases Involving Social Media

Alan Blue v Food Standards Agency: A food inspector who dismissed after 'liking' a Facebook comment about his boss being attacked with a chair. His employer dismissed for a breach of trust. He was awarded over £32,000 in compensation for unfair dismissal. In the judgment, the tribunal found that although the employer had a social media policy, it did not cover actions outside of the work environment.

Crisp v Apple Retail: An employee posted negative comments online about his employer and their products. The tribunal held that the comments were likely to damage the employer's reputation. The dismissal was fair because the employer had given the employee specific training on how to use social media, including a comprehensive social media policy.

Our Top FAQs

Can I control what my employee puts on social media, or prevent them from having an account?

Generally speaking, an employer cannot control what an employee does outside of the working relationship and therefore cannot ban employees from using social media. What an employer can do is make employees aware of how to use social media safely and appropriately so that this does not have an adverse impact on the employer or relationships with colleagues. An employer would be well advised to have a robust social media policy to be read in conjunction with other policies such as the disciplinary and Equal Opportunities policies.

Can an employee speak on behalf of their employer on social media?

Croner have found that many employees will do this, and most will do so quite innocently without realising the potential consequences of doing so. A robust policy should cover this aspect of social media use.

Can comments on Facebook be used in disciplinary hearings?

Yes, provided these comments have not been obtained unlawfully. If the information is obtained from a non-private account or passed to an employer via another employee, then the comments can be used, provided they are relevant to the issue under investigation.

Can an employee be dismissed due to a social media post?

Yes an employee can be dismissed, but this will be an exception to the norm and only where such an action amounts to Gross Misconduct.

Take Action: What Employers can do

Employers should always ensure that they have a robust social media policy in place, in addition to the normal disciplinary, and equal opportunities policies.

Regular training should also be considered to set clear expectations, communicate processes, and raise awareness amongst staff and managers regarding social media usage and how to stay safe online.

Furthermore, encouraging employees to stay safe online will raise awareness of other issues that businesses are particularly vulnerable to, including phishing emails and cyber attacks

The magnitude of circumstances relating to social media in the workplace is extremely vast, so for any bespoke and specific advice, please contact our helpline on **0800 032 4088**.

How to prevent issues arising from social media misuse:

1. Exercise care where employees and the employer can be identified from a social media post or profile
2. Communicate with employees to avoid engagement which could adversely affect the company or its reputation
3. No confidential or sensitive company information should be shared including via social media
4. Reiterate that employees are personally responsible for content
5. Understand that everything has potential to become public and widespread, and once a piece of information is posted, it is very easy to lose control of that information - confidential or otherwise
6. Clearly tell employees that information posted may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal
7. Employees can be required to remove content if deemed a breach of policy
8. The social media policy should be read in conjunction with all other policies.



Contact us

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