

The HR highs and lows of social media



Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have changed the world – and the workplace.

Tina Radford examines the role of social media from a law firm’s perspective.

If Facebook was a country, it would be the third largest in the world after China and India!

Social media is one of the most popular forms of communication on the planet today. It is becoming part of mainstream communication and marketing for every business, and it is time for law firms to get on board or risk being left behind.

Businesses, including professional services firms, are incorporating social media into their recruitment advertising strategies as it is a quick, cheap and effective alternative to traditional forms of advertising. But social media also has its risks, which will be explored later.

What is social media? Simply put, social media is people having conversations online. It represents a fundamental shift in the way we communicate with each other, not just socially but in the professional sense as well. Social media is not a passing fad or Rupert Murdoch would not have bought MySpace.

At a recent social media seminar run by DAIS brand strategy, it was stated that 95 percent of companies had used LinkedIn to find and attract employees, 59 percent used Facebook and 42 percent used Twitter.

According to Google, 78 percent of people surveyed trust peer recommendation and only 14 percent trust advertisements.

Illustrated here is the social media usage take up across the generation gap:

	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn
Baby Boomers	73%	13%	13%
Generation X	76%	18%	13%
Generation Y	65%	14%	9%

Source: Anderson Analytics

When used well, social media can have a positive impact on your employer brand. In Australia, businesses use social media in the following ways:



- 45 percent use it for candidate sourcing
- 28 percent use it to engage with communities
- 28 percent use it for employer branding
- 20 percent use it for client sourcing
- 12 percent use it for reference checking, although this can be an unreliable source of information with room for misinterpretation. It shouldn't be relied upon as the only avenue of reference checking.

It would be fair to say that most job seekers perform their career research and job hunting using the internet. Traditionally they would scan Seek and company websites, now investigating Facebook and LinkedIn is the new and effective job search method. Most job seekers would prefer to apply directly to your firm in the privacy of their own homes rather than through a recruitment agency. The great thing about social media is that it is interactive – you can have a direct conversation with interested applicants and engage with them prior to interview.

There has been a notable increase among law firms and the big four accounting firms in using various forms of social media in the quest to attract and recruit talented candidates. This is not surprising, given that a staggering 72.9 percent of Australians – 5.2 million people – who use the internet are engaged in some form of social media usage.

There are many benefits to using social media for recruitment purposes including:

- **Cost savings** – the costs of using print media or recruitment agencies is higher than using social networking sites.
- **Attracting Gen X and Y graduates** – both of these groups are large social media users.
- **Proactive talent sourcing** – it shortens recruitment timeframes and makes you stand out from the crowd.
- **Improved peer-to-peer engagement** – involving your staff in online conversations with potential employees is powerful stuff; remember people trust their peers more than advertisements.

Before you embark on creating your social media strategy, ensure that it is consistent with your brand objectives. Be clear on what you are trying to achieve. The key recruitment benefit for your firm in using Facebook or LinkedIn is it allows you to truthfully tell your employer story and connect with talented people.

It is time for law firms to get on board and utilise social media as a way to connect and stay connected with potential and current employees, and to take control of their employer brand to ensure a stable workforce in the future.

Is your firm protected by a social media policy?

Along with the many benefits of social media, there are real risks from a human and industrial relations perspective which employers should be aware of.

One of the main areas of concern centres on employees who make disparaging comments about their workplace on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Increasingly, HR consultants are advising employers on how to deal with the behaviour and conduct of their employees on social networking sites. Generally, employers cannot discipline an employee due to their behaviour outside of the workplace (although there are some exceptions). Unfortunately, employers are now faced with problems arising from offensive references to work-related matters being made via social media by employees in their own time.

Recently, Fair Work Australia ruled in favour of a Melbourne-based hairdresser who challenged her dismissal based on her Facebook update where she made a negative comment about her employer in relation to her pay and job satisfaction: "Xmas bonus alongside a job warning, followed by no holiday pay! Whooo! The hairdressing industry rocks man, Awesome."

As the employee in question hadn't named her employer, it was ruled that she hadn't adversely affected the business, however the ruling would have been different had her employer had a social media usage policy in place.

The best way for employers to protect themselves is to introduce a social media

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policy to provide clear directions to your employees about what is considered acceptable and unacceptable conduct from the employer's perspective in regard to employee social media activities. Introducing a clear policy on the dos and don'ts is the first step towards reducing the risk to the employer and protecting your firm's image and brand.

A good social networking policy should include the following:

- a definition of social networking, including reference to specific sites such as Facebook
- a list of what is acceptable and unacceptable social networking behaviour in the eyes of the company, with examples
- clear direction regarding accessing social networking sites at work – do you ban it altogether or limit it to an employee's lunch break?
- a definition of confidential information that covers information about your clients, other employees, and terms and conditions of

employment

- examples of inappropriate comments or conduct
- explanation of the consequences of breaching the policy, which may include termination of employment.

It is best to seek advice before issuing your social media policy to employees as it is difficult to control employees' social networking activities. The Commonwealth Bank recently softened the wording of its social media policy after a union warned that its attempts to restrict employees' use of social networking impinged on employees' workplace rights. As with most HR policies, they are a challenge to draft to ensure that they adequately protect the employer while being fair and reasonable to the employee.

Once you have developed your social networking policy and distributed it to staff, follow it up with training to ensure all employees understand what is expected of them. Training is the best way to sell change and help ensure compliance to new people policies.

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