

“Blogging” – opportunity or threat

‘Blogging’ is the term used to describe the practice of using an online diary to record events and thoughts. It has recently received a great deal of attention due to the recent case involving British-born secretary Catherine Sanderson who worked in Paris for the accounting firm Dixon Wilson and kept an online diary.

In the ‘blog’ she posted several critical remarks about her employer, as well as a number of comments about her love life. Once the secretary was identified by her employer she was promptly dismissed and she took her case for unfair dismissal to a French tribunal. The employee won the case and was awarded €44,000 plus costs. Whilst the blog had only received 3000 ‘hits’ prior to her dismissal the resulting publicity has increased that number to some 30,000. Not quite what Dixon Wilson would have hoped for!

The issue of ‘blogging’ has increasingly seen employers taking action to ensure that they are protecting themselves and some ‘savvy’ employers are even using ‘blogs’ as a tool to promote their organisations. So how can employers ensure that they are able to use ‘blogs’ to their advantage?

Making ‘blogging’ work

With a new generation of workers who have knowledge of ‘blogs’ and other social media, and the confidence to use them, it is up to employers to decide if they want to give employees the opportunity to use, but not to exploit ‘blogs’. ‘Blogging’ at work can help to build:

- Enhanced collaboration internally and with clients.
- Increased work efficiency and avoidance of e-mail overload.
- Enhanced employee participation.
- Improved recruitment.
- Inexpensive marketing.

Despite the benefits of ‘blogging’, many organisations fear that allowing their employees too much freedom may have a negative impact. Some of the perceived dangers of ‘blogging’ include:

- Video dangers. For example staff could post videos on sites such as YouTube.
- Employees ‘blogging’ (about work) in their own personal time.
- Employees spending too much time ‘blogging’ in their employer's time rather than promoting the business.

- Copyright infringement. The ease with which material can be copied and pasted means there is great potential to breach copyright law.
- Defamation. The relatively informal nature of the medium means that people can say things that they may later regret. Disclaimers cannot always protect a company against the misguided observations of a member of staff.

Safe 'blogging' advice

It is critical that businesses create some kind of policy. Individuals are capable and willing to 'blog' in their personal time and, unless monitored, this could cause damage to your online brand.

A good 'blogging' policy should be robust enough to protect your business but still encourage its use where appropriate.

The good news is that most employers have an e-mail and internet policy and, therefore, an appropriate adjustment to include reference to 'blogging' should not cause great difficulty. However, you must ensure such a change is properly communicated to your staff, and subsequently acted on.

If you wish to discuss this further with our HR Consultancy team please call

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