

Why employers need to monitor social media posts by staff

It is vital that employers keep an eye on what employees are putting out on social media platforms in order to manage the organisation's reputation and ensure that it is not associated with any controversial, discriminatory or damaging (legally, financially or otherwise) views.



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Kay Vittee, CEO of Quest Staffing Solutions, advises, “Potentially damaging activities range from sharing confidential information, infringing on customer privacy and cyber bullying, to posting comments that can be perceived as discriminatory or inappropriate, all of which elicit consequences – for both employee and employer.

“With the need for clear guidelines of what constitutes hate speech, defamation or racist content, the posts of staff on a public forum - even if in their personal capacity and out of working hours, can have a negative impact on an employer. As such, social media misconduct cases are becoming more common, with offensive remarks that bring employing organisations into disrepute being reported and employers taking the necessary action in terms of disciplinary hearings and/or dismissal.”

A recent example of such a scenario is that of an individual in the medical field who was dismissed from her position after having allegedly made comments on social media relating to a medical procedure undertaken on President Jacob Zuma’s wife in the hospital in which she worked.

Dealing with negative employee social media activity

“When an employee behaves in a way which makes the employer believe that a third-party may change his or her perception of the organisation, it is well within its rights to pursue legal action and dismissal.

“While this is an effective reactive measure of dealing with social media misconduct, it is important for business leaders to consider some preventative procedures that focus on educating staff on what is expected of them and how offences will be addressed. With this knowledge and understanding, employees can be better prepared, exercise good judgment and be equipped to deal with the consequences of their actions.”

“It may seem obvious but, within an employer’s social media policy, it is crucial to outline that employees should never share confidential and proprietary information online, forgoing to include this simple point can result in serious financial and reputational harm.

“Having a social media policy in place will, at the very least, act as a reminder for staff to be more aware of their online activities and think before they post.

“We live in the digital age and while it is essential for businesses to establish and grow their social media presence to connect and engage with the public, one needs to always keep in mind that nothing posted online is truly private,” Vittee concludes.

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