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Isaac M. O'Bannon • Sep. 05, 2014



The dilemma regarding Internet usage by employees during work hours has long been one of discussion by business owners, human resources professionals, IT professionals and staff. During the late 1990s, the concern was largely that of distrust over the new technology and countless dramatized stories about employers using their computers to access pornography, gambling and other inappropriate content.

By the middle of the first decade of the 21st Century (did we ever come up with a term for it, or are we going to call it the “Aughts” again?), with the widespread adoption of high-speed internet access at most businesses, this concern had narrowed more specifically on productivity issues, such as will employees waste all of their time on

shopping, gaming and other useless websites? And, well, porn and gambling were

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counterproductive for your practice and many other businesses:

1. **Social media can be good for your business and your employee's morale.** This depends on the nature of the business, but for professional services firms like tax and accounting offices, it's likely that every member (or almost every member) of your staff is a professional or paraprofessional. As such, they have specialties that can be touted on your firm's Facebook page, or tweeted about. And since social media is something that some people "get" more inherently than others, allowing staff to post business-appropriate messages is a good way to find your firm's social media "champion."
2. **Blocking websites can foster a feeling of distrust.** Most businesses, particularly accounting and financial services firms, hire people they believe they can trust. With client security such an important issue, this is imperative. And while there is inevitably the occasional employee who turns into something less-than-hoped-for, or worse, the perception that an employee is trusted by their boss is one of the most powerful loyalty-building traits in a manager.
3. **Blocking websites may not be effective anyway.** Facebook users can now reply by email to messages, and savvy users may be able to find a way around your blocking strategies.
4. **Everybody's got a smartphone these days.** According to an April report by Millennial Media (www.millennialmedia.com/2011/05), the top 20 selling mobile phones are now smartphones. So with full internet connectivity and access to social media and other apps, disabling use on the desktop may not have much of an effect anyways. And for younger users (under 25), mobile devices are often the preferred method of social media interaction.
5. **The bottom line.** You are running a business, of course, not a feel-good-about-your-manager morale or self-worth-building nonprofit, so the bottom line is the bottom line. Will blocking social media make your employees more productive? Will allowing them access to it make them more productive?

As with studies that looked into other forms of internet usage in the past 15 years, the

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minor trade-off that results in a little of their private life reaching into their workday, and vice versa. As the manager, owner or partner, you are the one who sets productivity goals and expectations for your staff, so you are the one who will know if someone is lagging, for whatever reason. If they are performing as expected or better, then they are successfully balancing this trade-off.

For more social media tips for your practice, see:

6 Pointers for Your Firms Social Media Strategy

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/10243408

Leveraging Social Media to Build Your Business

www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/10268415

Boxout

Security Tip: Be Skeptical of Shortened URLs

They are everywhere, especially on social networking sites, blog posts and other online news sources. But what you can't see can hurt you and your computer. There are many versions of web-address shortening tools out there (TinyURL, Bit.ly, Ow.ly, etc.), and they are definitely useful resources, since some websites have monstrously long URLs. For the most part, the tools are offered by legitimate companies. Some are even built into apps like TweetDeck and HootSuite.

The potential problem is this: There's no way of really knowing where that link is going to take you. While the full browser version of Facebook at least offers the

headline from the original article and the real source, it's not foolproof, and tweets

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For instance, the long web address for this article can be shortened to www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/10278893. It's not as short as a TinyURL, but it at least keeps the name of the website obvious to potential clickers.

Technology

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