

Checking Facebook at work? Your boss likely doesn't like it

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More than half of employers say they completely prohibit social media use by workers, according to a new survey of about 1,400 large U.S. companies. But what if the CEO is in her office using LinkedIn, your boss just invited you to become a fan of the company Facebook page, or your competitors are connecting with your clients on Twitter?

Welcome to one of the toughest issues facing employers: Is [social networking](#) a valid part of our work life today, or is it "social not-working"?

"It's a blurry line," says Gary Henning, Charlotte-based district director for Robert Half Technology, which conducted the survey. "People are getting their arms around best practices, and there are a lot of concerns. This is a big topic for employers."

Employer Mark Gilman fired an employee whose [personal life](#) became too much of a distraction, "and social media was a big part of that."

Gilman is president of Decus Communications, a marketing firm with offices in Michigan and Charlotte. He sees the value in social media, and uses it himself, but he sees a generational difference with employees.

"The thing that concerns me most is (that) millennials seem to be more concerned with [social networking](#) than doing their jobs," Gilman said.

"If you're using social media at work and that's not your job, you should be fired," says productivity expert and author David Allen. But a lot depends on what you're doing on social networks, and what your company culture is. "We're still experimenting with what's OK."

And what's OK for one company is not for another, says Chris Boudreaux, who has worked with Forrester Research to create SocialMediaGovernance.com. The platform helps employers find good approaches, and includes a database of more than 100 social-media policies.

"In fact, social media practices vary from employee to employee, sometimes," says Boudreaux, who formerly worked in Charlotte for a predecessor of Bank of America. In a large bank, he says, it would be appropriate for communications and marketing staff to use social media at work. But someone processing checks should not be on the sites. Other experts say approaching social media from the standpoint of what employees can't do is the wrong approach.

"Clamping down on social media use doesn't work," says Richard Brasser, whose Targeted Group advises several top financial institutions on social media approaches. "With big companies, their normal slant, their gut reaction, is 180 degrees from where they need to be."

Brasser says fearing what employees will do on social media is like following your kids around to protect them. "You have to train them right, show them what to do, and what not to do, and then trust them some."

The survey was developed by Robert Half Technology, which provides companies with information technology professionals. It was based on telephone interviews with more than 1,400 chief information officers from companies with 100 or more employees across the United States.

The survey asked, "Which of the following most closely describes your company's policy on visiting social networking sites, such as [Facebook](#), MySpace and Twitter, while at work?" Fifty-four percent said their companies "prohibited completely" workers' use of social media; 19 percent said "permitted for business purposes only"; 16 percent said "permitted for limited personal use"; 10 percent said "permitted for any type of personal use"; and 1 percent said "don't know/no answer."

Derek Kelley, a Wells Fargo operational risk consultant in Fort Mill, S.C., says his employer has been receptive to social media and basically takes a policy of asking employees to use common sense. Still, Kelley doesn't use Facebook at work, and says he only checks Twitter on his mobile device during lunch and on breaks.

But he says checking Twitter gives him access to useful computer links to financial sites, and actually helps him in his job. So why only check Twitter on his own time? "It just keeps things simpler."

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