Social Media at the Law Firm – Embrace it or Ban it?

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Firms Weigh the Pros and Cons in Giving Lawyers Access to Social Media Websites

Legal marketing experts often encourage the use of social media among lawyers in an effort to help them make contacts, connect with clients, and build business. But while there is value in connecting with people throughout the day on social networks, some businesses - even law firms - fear their employees will waste time or reveal information that could damage a relationship with a client.

So, what's a law firm - or any business - to do? Embrace social media or ban it?

Cindy Krischner Goodman's newspaper column tackled this very topic last week. In **Social-Media Use Troubling Some Managers**, she profiles various accounting and legal firms - and their partners - to reveal opposite philosophies concerning social media.

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Here's an excerpt:

As a boss, Max Borges chose to embrace it. His Miami agency provides marketing to consumer electronics and personal technology manufacturers. It is flush with young account executives whom Borges trusts to use social networking productively. "They work hard and get their job done. I know they might be posting during the day, but if they were slacking, it wouldn't go unnoticed."

Borges says he's wise enough to know his employees are going to be on Facebook or blogs whether or not he bans them. So instead he held a meeting and taught his workers about privacy settings and etiquette around social networks. "I think the way to go is to talk openly about expectations, respectful conduct and productivity."

At the other extreme, financial firms like JPMorgan Chase and Morgan Stanley or traditional companies like FPL chose to block or forbid employees from going to external sites at work. Indeed, one in four companies blocks access to social networks because they view them as a productivity-killer, according to a 2008 survey of 200 human resource professionals by Challenger Gray & Christmas, an outplacement consulting firm.

Technology innovation expert Scott Klososky calls corporate attitude toward social networking a replay of their original response to the Internet. "They blocked the Internet, but it was so powerful they had to quit blocking and change to monitoring."

Banning it outright might not work anyway. According to a study by Ruder Finn, a public relations agency, most people are using their handheld devices to go online instead of desktop computers, with 91% of mobile phone users going online to socialize compared to only 79% of desktop users. And, as experts note, if workers are forced onto their handhelds, employers can't monitor their usage.

The truth is that, yes, Facebook and **Twitter** can be valuable marketing resources - but there is something to be said about indulging in a little "brain candy" periodically throughout the day. And, for the most part companies are OK with that - as long as productivity doesn't suffer.

Bottom line: If you're using social media at work - it's wise not to cross the line. Use it for business. Save the funny updates and pictures for your off time.