

APPOINTMENTS

Perils of the global web

While the ascent of social networking is helping to connect people and brands globally, employees should be mindful of what they are posting on such sites

Linda Daly

LAST week, a teenager in the UK made headlines when she was sacked from her job for describing her administrator's position as "boring" on Facebook. According to media reports, her bosses were none too happy about her comments and ceased her employment with immediate effect.

The 16-year-old argued that Facebook is a personal site and the Trade Union Congress in the UK defended her, comparing the company's actions to following employees to the pub to see if they were giving out about work.

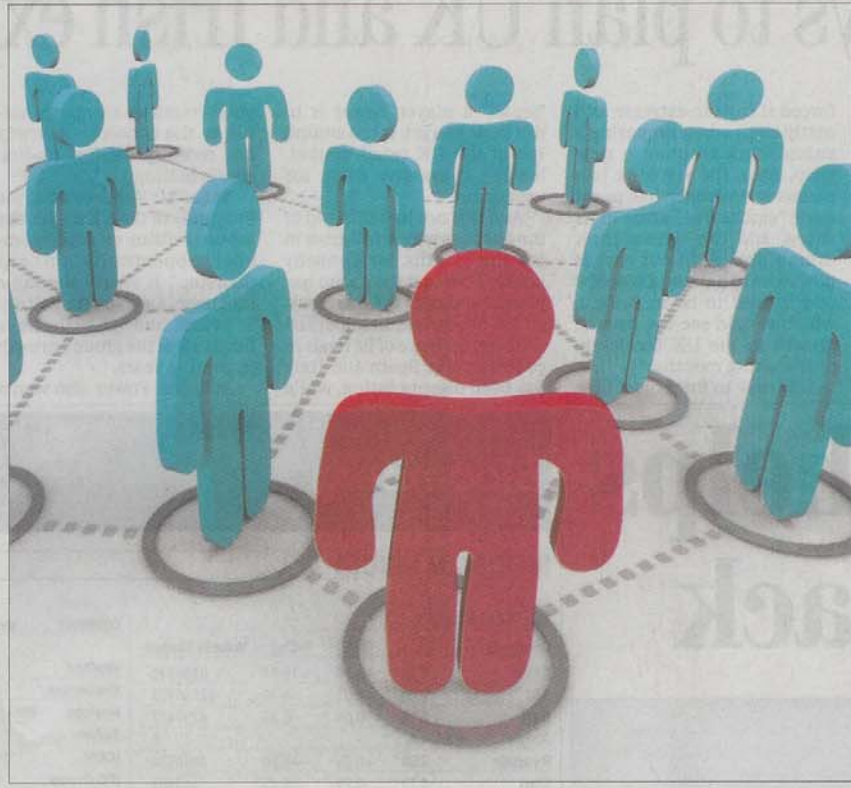
Carol Ann Casey, managing director of CA Consulting, says employees should be very careful what they say or write, when and where they are.

"People need to mind their jobs and respect their employer when using the public domain. It's about positive respect for your employer, and a positive attitude to your employer, their clients and to your peers who work in the same organisation."

Another area in which social networking has been seen to impact on work is the reported use of sites such as Facebook to vet candidates for recruitment.

"This is no doubt a temptation for many managers seeking to appoint staff, but any employer who takes equal opportunities in recruitment seriously should not be considering this to avoid possible discrimination claims," says Casey.

Krishna De, managing director of business development



SHOWING RESPECT: When social networking, people should be mindful that their employer could be swooping in on their profile, so it's important not to get too personal about your workplace

consultancy, Oneocean, says, however, more and more employers are googling potential recruits.

"It's no different than if you were going to do an interview and asked a colleague what a jobseeker was like. Many people don't realise that employers ask those questions offline and do reference checks."

But can an employer just sack you because of what he or she reads on Facebook? "In my view,

every dismissal can be deemed to be unfair, so it is vital that it is investigated and there is a right to reply to the allegation before such an action is taken," says Casey.

She encourages employers to have robust IT policies and confidentiality and non-disclosure clauses built into their contracts. Very importantly, she adds, they should ensure they are communicated and up to date to cover social-

networking issues.

"Both blogging and social networking seem to be more prevalent with Generation Y candidates. Again, good communication about what is and is not acceptable is vital. Employers need to work in partnership with their staff to develop workable conduct policies, and ensure these are well communicated to everyone working for them."

Casey advises all employees

'PEOPLE NEED TO MIND THEIR jobs and respect their employer, certainly when in the public domain'

to consider the privacy of their networks.

"It's easy to delve into lots of these networks, which are free. We need to consider whether we're going to use this just for friends and family or a wider network. Many of us forget to review our privacy settings, so we have to become more educated with them."

"Some people jump to Twitter or Facebook to post their feelings. The important thing to understand is that when you've done that there's no taking it back."

However, De stresses that there are also huge benefits to be gained in business from social networking. She recently worked with a guy who put his business idea on a Facebook page and ended up with €36,000 worth of business in three weeks.

"There is huge business to be done. People are being approached in terms of joint ventures. We shouldn't be afraid to explore social networks for business," she says.

Casey agrees: "Such sites can provide sales leads, connect people globally, allow people to post their views and details about themselves/their resumes and boost your brand."