



## **Factsheet Seventeen**

### **EMAIL, INTERNET AND FACEBOOK AT WORK**

Most employers allow employees access to the internet during working hours for business purposes. More often than not, staff are allocated a work email address and may even be encouraged to 'befriend' the workplace Facebook page.

What sometimes becomes difficult for employees is the ability to draw the line between professional internet use and personal internet use. Commonly, employers allow reasonable access to email and the internet for personal use. Access to Facebook for personal reasons is less common in the workplace but more employers are understanding that allowing reasonable access to Facebook (and other social media sites) is better than blocking the site altogether.

If you are unsure what 'reasonable' access is, check with your employer. Your employer may provide you with a verbal explanation as to what she or he considers reasonable or they may provide you with a written policy on reasonable internet access. If your organisation has a policy, we encourage you to read it.

#### **A guideline to reasonable internet access?**

In the absence of a written policy regarding email, internet and Facebook at work, the following guideline may assist you to evaluate your usage at work:

- reasonable private use of the internet and email is a privilege and such use needs to be balanced in terms of the operational needs of the organisation;
- your use must be appropriate, lawful, efficient and ethical;
- be aware of what you are accessing and how long you are accessing sites for personal use;
- remember inappropriate use may be subject to disciplinary action including termination of employment and/or criminal prosecution;
- inappropriate use includes transmitting, communicating or accessing pornographic material or sexually explicit images;
- it is inappropriate, in most workplaces, to transmit, communicate or access any material which may discriminate, harass or vilify colleagues or members of the public because of their race, sexuality, disability, age, pregnancy, religion or marital status

for example;

- always remember that your email address belongs to your employer and can be accessed at any time if your employer reasonably believes you have breached a policy or the law; and
- do not allow your internet access to interfere with your expected output. If your work is suffering because of your internet usage, then it is reasonable to expect you are not managing your access properly.

If you are unsure, check with your employer.

### Can I be dismissed from work due to my internet access?

Yes, it is possible to be dismissed from your job if you abuse your internet and email privileges. It is for this reason that we encourage workers to clarify what access is permitted at work; remember each workplace is different.

### Facebook and the workplace

People who share just a little too much information on Facebook may end up in hot water with their employer especially if they provide details about their workplace, business or colleagues.

#### Quick tips for Facebook users

- Do not make any negative or personal statements on your Facebook page about the workplace or colleagues.
- Do not breach your employer's confidentiality by writing about your work without your employer's permission.
- Do not post statements such as 'having a great day at the beach' when you have called in sick to work.
- Think seriously before accepting a 'friend request' from a colleague or manager. Ask yourself - is it appropriate for your colleagues to have access to your private photos, friends and personal life?

#### Tips for the worker and the workplace

- Find out if your employer has a policy on Facebook. If not, encourage them to develop one. This might help you, as an employee, in the future to understand your own rights and responsibilities.
- It's not enough for a workplace to have policies which are not accessible to staff. Encourage your employer to provide professional development such as training or discussion in team meetings about the issue.
- Be involved in policy creation regarding social media issues. This process will help employees comprehend the policies and will also likely foster staff buy-in. Policies should be clear and specific. Policies should include rationales, legal support and

commentary with examples.

- Be aware of the consequences for violations in policies.
- Ensure that the implementation of policies is non-discriminatory. That is, the same policies should apply to managers and other staff alike.
- Encourage your employer to amend policies as the law evolves.

## Where can I get more help?

### **NT Working Women's Centre**

Freecall: 1800 817 055

Web: [www.ntwwc.com.au](http://www.ntwwc.com.au)

### **Your Union**

Unions NT

Ph: 8941 0001

Web: [www.unionsnt.com.au](http://www.unionsnt.com.au)

### **To access an interpreter**

Interpreting and Translating Service NT

Ph: 1800 676 254

Web: [www.itsnt.nt.gov.au/](http://www.itsnt.nt.gov.au/)

Aboriginal Interpreter Service

Ph: 8999 8353

Web: [www.ais.nt.gov.au/](http://www.ais.nt.gov.au/)

### **For people with a hearing and/or speech impairment**

National Relay Service

Ph: 133 677

Freecall: 1800 555 677

The NT Working Women's Centre provides free and confidential information, advice and assistance to women about work related matters.

The NT Working Women's Centre gratefully acknowledges funding provided by the NT Department of Business and Darwin City Council in funding this factsheet. The information, opinions and advice contained have been prepared with due care and are believed to be correct at the time of printing. The publishers expressly disclaim any liability whatsoever to any person who suffers any loss arising from the contents of, errors in, or omissions from this publication. This factsheet is not intended as a substitute for legal advice. Please seek advice for further information about your situation. December 2013.

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