

Factsheet Twenty-One

Email, internet and social media 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's social media 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 social media sites for personal reasons is less common in the workplace but more employers are understanding that allowing reasonable access to sites such as Facebook 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 social media 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, social media 'stories' and the workplace

People who share just a little too much information on their social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat may end up in 'hot water' with their employer especially if they provide details or imagery 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.
- Remember that even posts made anonymously may breach your employer's policies or expectations and lawfully result in disciplinary action if you are identified.
- Do not post statements such as 'having a great day at the beach' when you have called in sick to work.
- Your uniform identifies your employer. Think twice about posting images or videos on social media whilst wearing your employer's uniform including badges, security passes and lanyards. Many employers have an alcohol policy and a simple 'after work drinks' post may have serious ramifications on your employment.

- 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 social media. If not, encourage them to develop one. This might help you, as an employee, to understand your own rights and responsibilities in the future.
- 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 Ph: 1800 817 055 www.ntwwc.com.au	Your Union Unions NT Ph: 8941 0001 www.unionsnt.com.au	NT Anti-Discrimination Commission Ph: 1800 813 846 adc.nt.gov.au
Australian Human Rights Commission Ph: 1300 656 419 www.humanrights.gov.au	Fair Work Ombudsman Ph: 13 13 94 www.fairwork.gov.au	Fair Work Commission Ph: 1300 799 675 fwc.gov.au
NT Police Ph: (emergency) 000 If calling from a mobile: 112	Office of the Commissioner of Public Employment (OCPE) Ph: 8999 4129 www.ocpe.nt.gov.au	NT WorkSafe Ph: 1800 019 115 www.worksafe.nt.gov.au

Your HR Department

Aboriginal Interpreter
Service

Ph: 1800 334 944

www.ais.nt.gov.au

To access an interpreter
Interpreting and Translating
Service NT

Ph: 1800 676 254

www.itsnt.nt.gov.au/

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