SOCIAL MEDIA: Consultant warns of problems employees face when using the Internet at work

Employers, beware of time thieves

LAURA STRADIOTTO
For The Sudbury Star

Chances are you've already checked your Facebook page today.

But you may want to think' twice about lashing out on your boss or boasting how many beers you guzzled the night before.

That's just cause for dismissal.

"You put it on Facebook? Guess what? It's there and it could be used against you," said Marcel Faggioni, senior consultant with Integrity Management Consulting Group.

"What we are seeing are people criticizing their employer through Facebook. Or, even doing things that provides some description of their lifestyle, which can be used to their detriment. Especially if you are in a high-profile position, your conduct outside of work could have a detrimental effect on the public image of that company."

Not only can posting a comment damage a company or get you fired, there is what Faggioni calls "time theft" or lost productivity.

Faggioni has investigated countless cases involving employee misuse of the Internet.

One particular case involved an unnamed university where staff was spending so much time on Facebook, there was loss of productivity. Staff was squabbling because' someone "unfriended" and in some cases, there was cyber bullying.

"It was causing conflict between the staff because there were cliques that were developing ... it was like a sandbox."

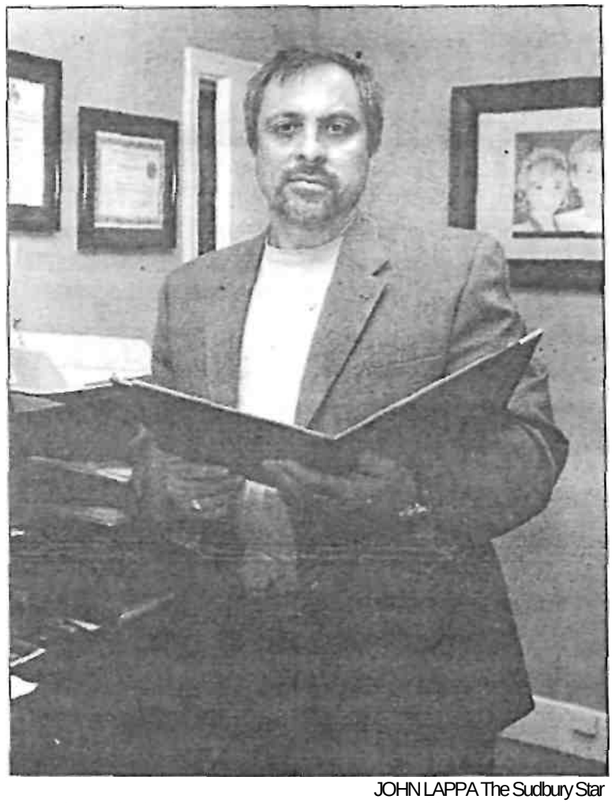
One of the recommendations Faggioni's company made was to remove access to the Internet, particularly social networking sites.

"The problem was time theft," said Faggioni.

"People come into work; you expect them to do good work and not to start socializing, exchanging recipes or whatever the case may be."

Another option for employers to consider is to have only one computer with Internet access, situated in a visible area where only one person at a time can use it.

Faggioni also led investigations where people were caught downloading pornography off the Internet at work.



JOHN LAPPA The Sudbury Star
Marcel Faggioni, of Integrity Management Consulting Group, says employees' online habits can be damaging to business.....

If you have a position such as a clerk, someone, who is providing secretarial services, why would that person need the Internet?"

Marcel Faggioni

One particular case involved a woman who was accessing gay male porn.

"There's probably tons of examples out there where ... people are taking advantage of having unlimited access to the Internet and various social sites," he said.

"Even if it's not as offensive as downloading porn, they're still spending time doing things that are detracting them from the work."

Other than developing policies, employers should reassess employees' need for the Internet or limit their online freedom.

"If you have a position such as a clerk, someone who is providing secretarial services, why would that person need the Internet?"

From an employer's perspective, the amount of recreational time spent on the Internet is an "incredible waste of time.

"This is a problem a lot of employers are facing and you need to prepare for that sort of thing," he said. "Be proactive."

Faggioni advises employers to develop rules and do random computers checks.

So it's a good move when hiring a new employee to set the ground rules; have policies in place about Internet use.

Faggioni said there are three areas of concern when considering employees "Face-book venting."

Harassment or threatening another employee could constitute as an Occupational Health and Safety Act or Ontario Human Rights violation.

Comments posted like "I hate my job" could damage an organization's branding image and hinder future recruitment efforts.

Viewing, receiving or distributing offensive material is just cause for dismissal.