

Press Release:

London, 26th October 2009 - Research released today by Morse, the IT services and technology company, has shown that use of Twitter and other social networks by employees at work is costing UK businesses £1.38 billion each year in lost productivity. From the 1,460 office workers surveyed over half (57%) said that they used social networking sites during the working day for personal use. On average those people were spending 40 minutes on these sites each week, equating to just under a full working week being wasted each year by employees using social networking sites at work. The time wasted could be even higher as the research also revealed that on average office workers think that their colleagues spend nearly an hour (59 mins) each day at work on social networking sites. This clearly shows the productivity strain that such online behaviour is having on businesses.

“The popularity of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook has grown considerably over the last couple of years, however with it has come the temptation to visit such sites during office hours. When it comes to an office environment the use of these sites is clearly becoming a productivity black hole,” commented Philip Wicks, consultant at Morse. “The recent case of Portsmouth City Council banning Facebook access for all employees was a high-profile example, but it is clear that businesses shouldn’t turn a blind eye to their employees’ use of social networks, and instead look to formulate and enforce sensible usage policies.”

When it comes to usage policies it is clear many businesses have some way to go, as of those surveyed just over three quarters (76%) said that their employer hadn’t issued them with specific guidelines with regards to using Twitter. Without guidelines and usage policies businesses are leaving themselves wide open to a reduction in productivity, brand damage and security risks.

Brand reputation is extremely important for every business, especially when it comes to social media. There have been several high-profile incidents recently, involving the likes of Curry’s, PC World, BA and Virgin Atlantic, where employees have abused customers on social networks and other public-facing sites thereby damaging those companies’ brands. Yet worryingly, despite a third of office workers admitting that they had seen sensitive information posted on social networks, overall 84% felt that it should be up to them as to what they post online. This indicates that guidelines are either being poorly communicated or are not strict enough.

Particularly when it comes to Twitter, many businesses also face security threats due to the increased use of URL shortening, meaning that employees can’t see the original address for the website they may be visiting. This potentially leaves employees open to phishing scams, malware and computer viruses, which could compromise a business’ IT security. Of the office workers

surveyed 81% admitted that they were worried they might be clicking on a link to an unsecure website.

“After years of preaching the security dangers of clicking on unknown emails and websites, employees can unintentionally be letting their guard down when it comes to clicking on links from the likes of Twitter and other social networking sites. It is important that businesses do their best to protect themselves by reiterating the dangers. However, if implemented correctly, the use of social networks can help facilitate closer ties with employees and customers. Therefore, businesses need to strike the right balance between engagement and productivity when it comes to employee usage,” concluded Philip Wicks.

The survey of 1,460 office workers was commissioned by Morse and conducted by independent research company TNS.