

Employees flying blind with social media, survey reveals

11 February 2010 – More than two-thirds of Australian employers don't have a policy to guide their employees' use of social media, according to a new Manpower white paper.

The white paper is based on a Manpower survey of 34,000 employers in 35 countries, including over 2000 Australian respondents, which gauged employer attitudes toward social media in the workplace.

It found most are yet to form an opinion: globally, 75 percent of employers have no formal social media policy, although Australia is slightly more advanced, at 67 percent.

Of those organisations with formal social media policies in place, the majority said that the policy has been most effective in preventing productivity loss (63 percent globally, 76 percent in Australia) and protecting intellectual property/proprietary information (33 percent globally, 37 percent in Australia).

According to Lincoln Crawley, Managing Director, Manpower Australia and New Zealand, it's time for business leaders and managers to consider how social media will affect their organisation.

“Social media is here to stay, and the distinction between work use and personal use is increasingly blurry. Social media is redefining the way we work, so rather than trying to avoid it, businesses need to learn how to harness its power while managing its risks.”

Nor is limiting or blocking access to social media sites the answer, according to Manpower.

“There is not a lot you can do to curtail the use of Facebook or Twitter at work. Employees will simply pull out their iPhones or BlackBerries to get onto these networks. So the challenge – and the opportunity - is to turn them into a positive force,” Mr Crawley said.

The white paper argues that the connective power of social media can enhance productivity, innovation, collaboration, reputation and employee engagement within organisations.

“Leaders need to channel social media use in directions that benefit both the business and the individual. In fact, they can use social media in creative ways to do that. For example, challenge your employees to develop ways to do their job better through social media, and encourage them to share these innovations with their colleagues.”

Some Australian employers acknowledged the positive potential of social media: 31 percent believe it can boost brand building, and 21 percent see it as a promising method to foster collaboration and communication.

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“Most companies are only scratching the surface in understanding how these tools can be used in the workplace. So it’s important for us all to keep an open mind,” said Mr Crawley.

Developing guidelines for use should be a collaborative process, Manpower says.

“Allowing your employees to help develop and enforce your company’s guidelines will appeal to those already immersed in the collaborative social media space, and could ultimately be the deciding factor in whether your guidelines are instituted,” Mr Crawley said.

Manpower predicts that social media will eventually become a positive tool to increase employee engagement.

“Ultimately, organisations have an opportunity to use social media in a way that helps employees feel truly connected to the organisation and positive about their employer,” said Mr Crawley.

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For further information and to arrange an interview please contact:

Kaley Payne, Buchan Consulting, 02 9237 2800 or kpayne@bcg.com.au

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