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How Facebook ruined my career

Painful social-networking gaffes, with corporate consequences.

By Christopher Steiner and Helen Coster

With 400 million registered users, Facebook is a great place to find a job. For more than a few cavalier souls, it's a great place to lose one, too.

By now you'd think folks would know what to let fly on Facebook and what to keep to themselves. Not so.

"Common sense is a good guide here, but people can be so taken by the novelty of these sites that they forget there are consequences to posting the wrong thing," says Kerry Ryan, a litigation attorney with Tarlow, Breed, Hart & Rogers in Boston. Ryan specializes in disputes between companies and former employees--and he's seeing more and more bad situations kindled by poor judgment online.

Video: Filtering Facebook Friends

Many companies--including Cisco, IBM, GM, Wal-Mart and Intel--have formal social-networking policies. Of U.S. companies with at least 1,000 employees, 10% have disciplined their ranks for running afoul of the rules during the last 12 months, according to Proofpoint, an e-mail security and data-loss-prevention firm in Sunnyvale, Calif. Eight percent of those firms fired at least one employee for egregious violations.

[Slide Show: 11 Career-Ending Facebook Faux Pas](#)

"We see issues with social networking coming up more and more with our clients," says Katherine Parker, cohead of the employment counseling group at Proskauer, an international law firm.

Those "issues" can run the gamut. We trolled for some of the more downright damaging Facebook faux pas in recent memory. Below are a few gems. Click here for a longer list of more wince-worthy anecdotes. And, please: When in doubt, just make a phone call.

Loose Lips

An Atlanta police officer was terminated in December after posting sensitive information about his job on Facebook. Among his alleged leaks: his current cooperation with the FBI on a drug case; specific times when he would be working as a plain-clothes cop; and the fact that he was frustrated at work. The officer's Facebook account was private, but that didn't stop the department from booting him.

Baleful Boast

A Nebraska prison guard allegedly bragged on Facebook in February about smashing an inmate's face to the ground. Soon thereafter, two more Nebraska prison guards jumped in to voice their support. The state was decidedly unimpressed. All three guards lost their jobs in March.

Bad Medicine

Thirteen emergency room nurses and other staffers at Harrisburg Hospital in Pennsylvania were fired after a rousing--and racist--group chat on Facebook. Several of the nurses sued for unemployment compensation; that suit is still pending. They also plan to sue for wrongful termination.

Flying The Unfriendly Skies

Virgin Atlantic fired 13 of its cabin crew members after they aired nasty thoughts about the airline's safety standards and calling passengers "chavs"--English slang for poorly educated young people. The critics also claimed that the planes were full of cockroaches and that the airline replaced its engines four times in one year.

Soaring Low

Dan Leone, a Philadelphia Eagles stadium operations worker, was unhappy with the NFL team's decision to let Brian Dawkins, a safety, sign with the Denver Broncos. So Leone vented to his pals on Facebook, declaring: "Dan is [expletive] devastated about Dawkins signing with Denver ... Dam Eagles R Retarded!!" He later deleted the post, but the Eagles fired him over the phone a few days later.

