

Chapter 49

Managing Employee Internet Abuse in the Digital Workplace

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ABSTRACT

Employee Internet abuse is a problem among organizations often resulting in poor job productivity, high turnover rates due to job loss, and the potential for legal liability. While organizations developed acceptable Internet use policies and monitored employee Internet usage, studies found that these methods alone were not enough to deter and prevent employee Internet abuse. This chapter describes the research surrounding employee Internet use and presents Young's model for preventing and addressing Internet use in the workplace. The model includes strategies in policy development, training, Internet monitoring, and revised termination policies for incidents of employee Internet abuse that include rehabilitation through the company EAP. Finally, the chapter addresses new trends in digital media abuse such as to Facebook and Twitter in the workplace and how these can create new kinds of technostress for those who become addicted.

INTRODUCTION

Internet abuse in the workplace is an issue in corporations. With statistics showing that employees are using the Internet during work hours for extensive personal and inappropriate use, organizations are striving to better regulate the use of the Internet to increase productivity amongst

employees. Despite the attention on effective ways to control employee Internet abuse through the implementation of software monitoring and acceptable Internet use policies, studies have shown that employee Internet use continues to cost firms money in terms of lost job productivity, increased turnover rates, and legal liability. This chapter reviews the literature involving employee

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Internet abuse and its costs. The chapter also provides a comprehensive framework that managers can utilize to prevent and deter employee Internet abuse at work. Finally, the chapter examines new concerns raised by mobile technologies and their impact for abuse, technostress, and addiction in the digital workplace.

OVERVIEW

In 2000, a landmark study from Websense Inc., a leading monitoring software firm, showed that online pornography along with online shopping, investing and sports watching online were leading causes of Internet misuse in the workplace. Some key findings from the survey included:

- 3.24 hours a week is the average time an employee spends looking at non-work related Web sites.
- 30.3 percent of workers watch sports online at work.
- 68.4 percent feel that employees should be allowed to access non-work-related Web sites at break times, before or after work.
- 56.6 percent favor filtering software that allocates time for personal Internet use each day at work.

In that same year, The New York Times fired 22 employees in Virginia for allegedly passing around potentially offensive electronic mail (The Associated Press, 2000). The Associated Press also reported that Xerox fired 40 workers for spending work time surfing pornographic and shopping sites on the Web. Dow Chemical Company fired 50 employees and suspended another 200 for up to four weeks without pay after an email investigation uncovered hard-core pornography and violent subject matter (Collins, 2000). A spokesman noted that there were a whole range of abuses from mild pornography to very graphic pornography and seriously violent im-

ages. According to Dow, no material that could be classified as illegal was found. However, the violations were made by workers at all levels in the company. At the pharmaceutical giant, Merck & Company employees faced discipline, including dismissal, for inappropriate e-mail and Internet usage (DiSabatino, 2000). Merck would not indicate how many employees had been terminated or otherwise disciplined, how many employees had been subjected to Internet monitoring or what, specifically, employees had communicated or downloaded to provoke the measures.

As reports increasingly showed that incidents of employee Internet misuse were on the rise, new research emerged to measure the effects of this type of workplace behavior. The earliest scholars studying employee Internet abuse include Drs. Carl Case and Kimberly Young, professors in management at St. Bonaventure University. Their research developed an initial Internet E-Management Framework (Case & Young, 2001) to serve as a guide in analyzing Internet behavior. The Internet E-Management Framework utilized four constructs (Figure 1). These constructs are identified as e-management, enforcement, job necessity, and e-behavior. Each construct is hypothesized to impact productivity. E-management and enforcement are organization-level or macro constructs. E-management is the organization's culture relating to their tendency of being proactive to Internet misuse. Possible proactive practices include policy implementation, screening, training, monitoring, or no measures. Enforcement can be stated as the organization's tolerance or reaction to employee Internet misuse. Possible reactions include discipline, dismissal, rehabilitation, or no reaction. Job necessity and predominant e-behavior are employee-level or micro constructs. Job necessity relates to the percentage of time that the Internet is necessary to perform individual job functions relative to the individual's total work time (daily hours necessary on Internet to perform duties / total hours per day productive). Predominant e-behavior includes dysfunctional

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