

The use of Information Technology in the workplace

by Neil Largan

Partner & Head of Dispute Resolution

The use of Information Technology in the workplace is so widespread these days; there are virtually no jobs that do not require the use of email and internet to some extent. There are many advantages and benefits of electronic communication - speed of communication and ability for flexible working – and for using the internet to carry out your own industry research online as well as promoting your ‘shop-window’ via a website. Whilst the development of IT has brought great benefits to businesses, the use of email/internet or more accurately misuse can cause employers huge headaches.

Up until recently the main concern for most employers was the downloading of offensive material by employees, such as pornography. However, increasingly employers are experiencing huge problems with workers doing their shopping on company time! A recent survey indicated that 40% of employees regularly visit Ebay, the Online Shopping Auction website, during the working day. Other research has shown that some workers are spending up to three hours a day surfing the net!

So what should a prudent employer do? Have a full comprehensive policy dealing with use of emails/internet in your workplace making it clear that;

- ◆ Employees may not commit the company financially by email unless express authority has been provided.
- ◆ Employees may not use instant messaging systems.
- ◆ Logging on to sexually explicit, racist or sexist sites etc will lead to summary dismissal.
- ◆ Employers should make it clear they reserve the right to monitor emails / use of internet by their employees.
- ◆ Allow personal use during lunch breaks only.
- ◆ Any attachments received with an email must be checked for viruses.

The above are only a few examples of what should be included in an effective policy governing the use of internet/email. If your business has no policy at all then it would be very difficult to start disciplinary proceedings or even dismiss, without facing a claim by an employee that they have been unfairly treated.

Your business should ensure individuals 'sign off' that they have read and understood the policy. You should also consider providing guidance on internet and email use as part of your induction process for every new worker.

Simple: If you tell your employees the rules in black and white through a written policy, anyone who breaks the rules will find it difficult to defend their actions.

For specialist employment law advice, please contact Neil Largan on 01904 624185 or employment@crombiewilkinson.co.uk

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