

# Cyberwork

## Cyberslacking – internet use policies at work

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A colleague of mine had an interesting (and, we found, somewhat amusing) experience when looking for resources for a client recently. As a therapist working with those with eating disorders, she sometimes uses the internet to find companies that cater for dress sizes outside of the norm and quickly Googled 'larger women' to pin down a specific type of outlet in her client's geographical area. While the search did indeed produce the desired outcome, Google also provided her automatically with pictures of women in various stages of undress, causing her to slam shut the laptop before her colleagues could notice.

Most internet searches at work are innocent, but if your company has a policy on internet use (and most do), you should make yourself familiar with it. More importantly, find out what you should do if the red flags start pinging up identifying you as being at fault if a guiltless search makes it appear you are guilty of using work time to search for personal areas of interest. This can be of particular relevance to mental health counsellors, where our clients' issues are often something we seek to know more about. For example, my work in the field of gambling addiction and the impact of social gaming on mental health often means that I get bombarded with adverts for online casinos and online bingo websites – not a problem (although irritating) in my home office setting. But it is something that could cause concern to my employers at work if it identified me as someone with a gambling habit which could affect company time and productivity.

Most companies understand that a lock-down on using the internet for personal purposes during a lunch or coffee break, such as looking at Facebook or booking train travel, is unreasonable – and most employees understand that cyberslacking at work is an unacceptable use of company time. This two-way street works positively for both parties – employees get some downtime and relaxation while in the workplace, and

employers get happier workers as a result. Affording some trust to employees to surf responsibly while on company time simply makes for a happier environment. In addition, workplace internet blockers help employees avoid situations such as harassment as a result of pornography being accessed and being used to unsettle or bully co-workers.

However, it is worth having simple strategies in place if you find yourself the subject of investigation by your Chief Information Officer (CIO) or their teams because of an internet search, as could have happened to my colleague searching for 'larger women' or indeed myself because of researching the adverse affects of gambling and gaming. When monitoring tools are implemented in the workplace, it is usually done to protect the company from inefficient workers as well as spotting legal concerns, and corporate culture and employee morale remain undisturbed.

If you have a genuine work need to use the internet to search for any content in relation to your clients' issues, or indeed any other reasons to look up research that could trigger the keywords used in monitoring systems, it may be wise to warn your employers in advance. Monitoring applications are designed to be tweaked and to be flexible, so they can be configured manually to allow access to certain types of website necessary for your work. Furthermore, you can educate IT departments or teams as to the reasons why some areas of seemingly disreputable content may surface in the line of your work with clients, and so pre-empt the often long waits for firewalls to be removed which can hinder your efficiency at work in general. Making a business case for access to areas of the World Wide Web can be time consuming, so work with your employers to make sure they understand the nature of your work at ground level.

Finally, if you are moving into the realm of using electronic ways of communicating with your clients, you may already have come up against email account blocking or policies that

dictate membership of an intranet for communication. This is particularly the case for school or higher education institutions, where the level of protecting young people from cyber-harm is more prevalent. In these environments, it is worth being prepared for discussing the need for an entire new workplace system for client communication to be implemented, or allowing purchase of a bespoke platform designed for contact between therapist and client to allow distance sessions to take place.

Above all, remember that although company internet use policies often seem obstructive and over the top, they are there to protect both the employee and the employer. Crushing candies on work time is definitely cheeky, as Tory MP Nigel Mills found out recently!<sup>1</sup>

### References

- 1 Tory MP apologises for playing Candy Crush during committee. [Online.] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30375609> (accessed 5 June 2015).



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