

Why employees should use Facebook

 By [Mike Stopforth](#)

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Lately the press has been reporting that corporates in South Africa are starting to block employee access to social networking site, [Facebook](#). If you're looking for a business reason why you should allow them to, I'll give you five...

1. If you can't beat 'em...

If your employees aren't wasting time on Facebook, they'll waste time on something else. Collecting that extra cup of coffee. Smoking. Wandering aimlessly from building to building. Playing Freecell. If they're smart, as Vinny Lingham says, they'll just use their mobile phones. It's like telling your three-year-old not to touch the cookies. Forbidden fruit always tastes better.

Employees also waste time talking to friends and texting on their personal mobile phones but you don't ban those. For crying out loud, your employees waste time with email. Why not ban that, too? Heck, let's ban all electronic communication. That will really up productivity.

When technology leaps forward, find a way to harness and leverage it, don't avoid the trend - you will regret it later .

2. Learn something about your employees

Facebook can tell you a lot about the way your employees connect with each other, with your customers and with their networks. I'm sure if you saw your employees using LinkedIn.com, you'd be ok with it because it's a 'professional' social networking tool.

Facebook and LinkedIn function on the same fundamental premise - that social networks can be manipulated, leveraged and capitalised upon when they can be seen. Facebook is more fun than LinkedIn. In fact, Facebook has all but replaced LinkedIn for many business people (including myself) as a primary social networking tool. I get far more business from old connections remade and serendipitous meetings on Facebook than I ever did on LinkedIn.

A year ago, I'd have said something along the lines of "social networking is ever increasingly becoming a useful tool for individuals to enhance their professional lives". That statement has been made redundant by Facebook. Now it's all but stupid and narrow-minded not to have a Facebook profile. That's a strong statement but I mean every word of it.

I might have said the same thing of email ten years ago, when you were still deciding if it would be a useful tool for business (or if your employees would waste time with it)...

3. Talent attraction and retention

I bet you talent attraction and retention is top of your HR agenda. Possibly top of your business agenda. What message are you sending out to potential employees when you block Facebook? We discourage experimentation? We don't like the Internet? New trends equal taboo at our company? We don't trust you???

Have you thought about setting up a profile / group for your organisation? Speaking to new and emerging talent in their language, in their space? Going to them to show them you are genuinely interested in them?

Off the record, one of my more progressive customers, who has not blocked Facebook but rather encourages it, is actually hiring me to do an ANALYSIS of usage in the company to find out how they can leverage employee networks and the digital presence for talent attraction.

4. Learn something about your customers

As I write this, I have 475 Facebook friends. Most people have 50 - 100. You can tell that by looking at my Facebook profile. Delve a little deeper and you'll be able to see what music I listen to, what movies I watch, what events I'm attending in the next few weeks, what I like and don't like, what I do for a living, what groups I belong to, my educational background, my religious views, my sexual orientation. Heck, practically everything I'm prepared to let anyone know on the web is there.

Ask yourself this simple question: **Could you sell your product or service more effectively to me, knowing those snippets of info?** Could your salespeople? Could your client liaison guys? Could your front line people? I guess they probably could.

But I'll also hazard a guess that your front line were the first to have Facebook blocked from their terminals, because of course they are the cheap labour (who waste so much time already) in your workforce...

Would you be invading my privacy? Some would say yes. But if I'm thick enough to put all that out on the web and NOT expect someone to look at it, I deserve what I get.

Let me let you in on a little secret... I WANT you to look at my Facebook profile. I WANT you to know more about me - who I connect to, who I influence, what I do. I WANT YOU (and your highly trained sales staff) TO GIVE A DAMN ABOUT ME. And Facebook is the best opportunity you have to find that out.

If not Facebook, Google. Google my name and see what you get. It's my digital fingerprint - my Google CV.

Yes, I know what you're thinking: "Mike, you're a geeky dude - at best only 5% of our customers interact with the web the way you do". Fair enough and you're right. But you can rest assured that 5% is your most connected, progressive and, I daresay, influential market segment you have. Ask Dell. Another thought - this social connectivity trend is not abating. It's swelling. Which end of the trend do you want to be on?

5. You might learn something

What are you doing to upskill yourself in the social media/networking/software department? This is more than just tech, this is a human trend. Your employees are doing it. Your customers are doing it. And you're still getting your PA to print out your emails. Facebook could help you familiarise yourself with social networking, aggregation, blogging and a number of other social media trends and technologies that could stand you in good stead as the tide shifts.

It is no coincidence that GIBS and UCT GSB are running social media executive programmes. There is a need, and a market, for education in this new arena. Make sure you have the skills to capitalise on this new trend.

Facebook is the ideal sandbox - you need to learn to play again (and allow your employees to do so too) .

So there's lots you know about Facebook - it wastes time, slow down productivity and more. Hopefully this article has shed light on how it can be more than that.

But what you might not know is that Mark Zuckerberg, the 24-year old founder and owner of Facebook, has already gone on record as turning down no less than US\$1 billion from Yahoo! for the site. That was last year, before its explosion internationally. Now its estimated value is just short of US\$10 billion.

Shouldn't you be paying some attention to this thing?

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