Googalization: The Response to a "Friend Request" in the Workplace

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Connections, associations, relationships, affiliations, bonds, links, no matter what word you use, it all boils down to two words – social networking. Social networking used to mean meeting someone for a cocktail or a business luncheon, basically, face-to-face contact. Today there is no need to meet face-to-face when the Internet is readily available and requires less effort.

With the age of the Internet at the highest peak in its history, but surely not in its lifetime, the Internet provides connections for people all across the globe. Users gain access to an array of topics with an abundance of sources through Google. The Internet does not only provide its users with an unbelievable amount of information but with a way to connect and "link" with others globally through social networking websites. However, the "link" users obtain from social networking provides as many pitfalls as it does promises, especially in the workplace.

Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, and many other sites give Web 2.0 users a chance to "friend" people from all over the globe. Social networking sites change how the world connects together from news access to time management to relationships to communication and even right down to vocabulary and grammar. Prior to the Facebook era, "friend" was a noun but today "friend" is a verb. (In an English course, I would have been corrected for using "friend" in the sentence – "Hey, you should friend me.") With social networking taking over the lives and time of its users, workplace time and productivity appear to be neglected and decreasing. However, perhaps online social networking is just a plan that has yet to make its inclusion into the workplace.

A Request to the Workplace to "Friend Me"

Social networking sites are as relatively new as the latest iPad2 and smart phones. Therefore, social networking has yet to make a head-on charge into the working environment. Social Media, Social Networks, and blogs trace back to what is known as "Web 2.0," a term coined to explain online self-publication (Leader-Chivee 2008, 43). Plugging Web 2.0 into a Google search engine, I received nearly two billion hits in a matter of seconds. Web 2.0 gives access for users to provide a way for those with similar personal interests to connect and "friend" one another.

There are various forms of social networking. Blogs provide personal opinions and feelings as well as government information to new audiences and encourage public conversations on government issues. Social networking websites can support interaction in response to agency announcements while on a more personal level, engage people of similar interests to interact with one another. The purpose of video and multimedia sharing is to support public outreach, education, training and other communication with online audiences. Yet video and multimedia sharing also provides a form of entertainment for Web 2.0 users. Wikis support public collaboration, knowledge sharing, and input on government issues. Podcasts provide updates, coverage of live government deliberations, emergency response information, and how-to messages to the public. Mashups support richer information sharing by integrating external data and expanding government reach (Wilshusen 2010, 6).

Of all the various forms of social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and so on, LinkedIn is the professional equivalent for social networks. LinkedIn offers job postings and research tools and facilitates business inquiries and requests. MySpace is orientated with friends with commonalties and interests. Facebook was initially intended to unite college

students and alumni together but within the past few years has become another variation of MySpace with more capabilities. Due to its wide use and popularity, many agencies use Facebook and LinkedIn as a resource.

Currently, there are over fifty social networking websites with over one million users (Cardon 2009, 96). Facebook, MySpace, Friendster, LinkedIn, and Twitter are just a few of the top websites. YouTube is widely used for media and social garnering. As many Web 2.0 users engage in social interaction personally and professionally, new forms of social networks reshape how agencies interact with the public.

The Promises to being "LinkedIn" for the Agency

Social networking sites provide several positives for supervisors in areas such as efficiency and competitive advantages. Social networking sites usually begin in the marketing department. Agencies and organizations use networking sites for recruitment and retention concerns (Leader-Chivee 2008, 41). An organization posted for an engineering position on LinkedIn and within one business day had over one hundred resumes of well-qualified individuals (Davison 2011, 153). Robert Half International interviewed top management officers and learned that sixty-two percent of officers believe that professional networking sites will be beneficial in the recruiting process, and thirty-five percent believe social networking sites will be useful.

Many supervisors question how to attract, retain, and develop employees. The young college generation is more likely to work several different jobs over their lifetime as compared to the prior generations who work just a few during their lifetimes. Furthermore, social networking sites prepare talent pools by listing recruitment opportunities and forms of screening.

Many supervisors prior to hiring use networking sources as a form of screening applicants for positions (Leader-Chivee 2008, 43). Supervisors do not wish to hire employees who publish unprofessional and inappropriate pictures and posts that could reflect negatively on the organization. A college student applied for a summer job as a camp counselor. Her references were excellent, interview went well, and the director assured her that everything looked good. However, the director did not ask her to work because of MySpace images picturing her binge drinking (Davison 2011, 153).

Increased motivation is another positive attribute of social networking sites. One-fourth of employees leave their job due to a lack of social connectivity, and eighty percent believe that being connected in the workplace is critical (Leader-Chivee 2008, 42). When employees feel connected, workplace satisfaction increases. Just knowing others are connected to you keeps employees from feeling isolated and segregated from the group, bringing the entire agency together.

When employees are "LinkedIn" and satisfaction boosts so, too, does workplace performance. Trust enhances when employees are connected, making them more ample to listen to information presented. Internet users trust sites like Facebook and Twitter. If supervisors use networks that employees trust to get the message across, employees are more likely to accept and consider the supervisor's advice.

Social networks in organizations provide a transparency so that an agency may identify potential positives and negatives within the workplace. Guards come down on networking sites; people feel comfortable with one another. It also provides insight for innovative ideas and pulls all departments together to achieve the goal. Problems can be solved before they actually arise

through social networking as long as communication and connectedness is maintained throughout the organization.

Governmental organizations promote through social networks. A Pew public opinion poll (2011) shows a major growth in social networking websites. Forty-three percent of Americans indicate the Internet is a primary source of access for news and governmental information (PEW Research Center 2008). Twenty-seven percent of Americans get their news and governmental information from either Facebook or Twitter (PEW Research Center 2011).

Declining a "Friend Request" (Don't Worry we won't Tell Anybody)

Over half of organizations block social networking sites from employees (Leader-Chivee 2008, 45). Yet, if a ban is placed on social networking websites, many employees waste more precious time finding ways around the ban. With social networking websites on the rise, blocking the popular site today does not take care of the one tomorrow. There are areas many believe social networks have negative connotations upon in the workplace. Productivity, data leakage from staff gossip, swindles from cyber-crooks, and open access to organizational information due to poor control is some of the greatest concerns (Wilson 2009, 55).

Time theft is often an occurrence when social networking sites are used. Time theft is defined as stealing productivity minutes while on the organization's clock. Many believe, "Facebook is like jail. You sit around, waste time, have a profile picture, write on walls, and get poked by guys you don't really know" (Facebook).

"you deleted me cuz ur mad at me......wow real mature!" (Facebook Group)

Self-publication through blogs and wall posts potentially harm organizations because in seconds flat the information is "shared" on the Internet. Disciplining employees for behavior and publication outside of the workplace on their own personal time presents challenges. While

some forms of legality protect the employee, the organization is harmed by the employee's inappropriate behavior. For instance, an employee left work late one night on a project. Before leaving, he tweeted, "I hate my job at ABC Company. They are a horrible employer. As soon as I can find a new job, I'm out of here." Several of his managers who fired him the next day (Davison 2011, 153) read that tweet. In *Spanierman v. Hughes* (2008), a Connecticut teacher's firing over inappropriate postings on MySpace was upheld. Even though organizations are able to discipline or terminate for inappropriate behavior, damage control is hard to maintain when the damage is already done.

Employees or applicants need to remain aware that their tweets and posts reflect back on the agency. Before blogging, writing on walls, tweeting, or uploading photos, soon-to-be-applicants and employees should ask themselves a few questions. "Am I loading information that I want the world to see? Is this a picture that shows me in the best light? What impression would another person have of me if he or she went through my site?" (Roberts 2009, 111). Yes, a resume shows an applicant in his or her best light, but the wall shows what the applicant is really like after hours. Much of what is private is still viewable by would-be employers. CMT's Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making the Team provides some insight. One young trainee was called in to the office for discussion. Little did she know that the DCC judges could view her private sexually exploitative and drinking photographs online. As a Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader, her actions could reflect negatively on the DCC.

Human Resource personnel suggest if you do not wish your mother or grandmother to see how you act or the words you use online then it is probably in your best interest not to allow the rest of the world to see it. After all, our families have already seen us in our worst light and still love us, so if the information is so bad we would not want our own grandmother or mother to see it then it is probably inappropriate to show it to everyone else.

The Confirmation to Social Networking's "Friend Request"

Many agencies and organizations are accepting the idea of social networks inclusion in the workplace. With employees desiring to be "LinkedIn" with one another not only in the workplace but also in the world in general, organizations are more likely to plan social networks into future organizational patterns. Organizations even establish their own versions of social networking sites for their employees. These self-organized sites supply employers the benefit of maintaining some tracking over employees while still giving employees the privilege to connect with one another.

Some organizations have already begun adopting networking sites. British Telecom, Pfizer, Citrix Systems, and DOW Chemical have already taken this idea and spearheaded it into their organization (Leader-Chivee 2008, 44). Many organizations adopt policies for employees to follow to prevent employees using social networks from harming the organization. Educating users, keeping up-to-date information about the networks, opening-up but keeping control, and having employees protect their identities can allow employees the ability to use social networking websites and keep the organization from any legal qualms that may arise (Wilson 2009, 56).

Twenty-two of twenty-four federal agencies use Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube to establish connections with the public (Wilshusen 2010, 5). Agencies are required by the Freedom of Information Act to provide information to the public. An easy alternative to achieve this goal is through social networking websites (Wilshusen 2010, 2).

The United States military has even inducted a few social networking techniques. Yet, it poses challenges to the typical hierarchy and vertical lines of communication (Murphy 2010, 14). Military leaders like Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Rick West are able to communicate with thousands of sailors, worldwide, instantly. He can even still support the chain-of-command. When magazines, blogs, networking and media sites are used together, they support and enhance the chain-of-command (Murphy 2010, 14). However, little research has been conducted as to whether or not social networking sites would provide more pros than cons for the military.

Just years ago, the Internet was seen as a threat to the organizational structure. Now without Google, electronic mail, and news access from the Internet, organizations would be hard-pressed to function successfully. Yesterday, the threat was the Internet; today's threat is social networking sites; tomorrow it will be something entirely different.

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