

Should networking sites be banned from work?

Level: Pre-intermediate upwards

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Material needed: One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student, plus one copy of the role cards per group of up to eight students

Group size: Two plus (for the business scenario there should be a minimum of four students)

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 5/2010. The article discusses whether social networking sites should be banned from the workplace. Two experts from the business world put forward their opposing views on this topic.

The tasks in the student worksheets will encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and related functional language and also to develop and practise useful business skills, especially those involving social networking sites, voicing opinions and making managerial decisions in meetings.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys, extension tasks and lesson plans.

Warmer

Students should preferably work together to do this task. Alternatively, they could answer the questions by and for themselves and then discuss their answers.

The social networking sites mentioned in the article are Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. Ask the students what they know about these sites and make sure everyone is aware what the term *social networking* means before continuing with the lesson plan.

Working with a text

Stage 1: Decide whether you would like the class to work in pairs or groups and instruct them accordingly. Divide the pairs / groups so that one half is given Article A (page 2 of the student worksheets) and the other half is given Article B (page 3 of the student worksheets). The students should not receive both articles!

Stage 2: Before reading the article, the students should complete the key words exercise. These key words will help the students understand the article. By pre-teaching them in this way, you are enabling them to read the article without interrupting the flow to look up words essential for the comprehension. Allow them to work with a partner who is reading the same article and/or use a dictionary to help them.

Stage 3: All the students should read through their article quietly. Once they have done so, they should then make notes in the text box on page 1 of the student worksheets about the main arguments in either article A or B. This will prepare them for the next task.

Key:

Key words A:

1. *banning*
2. *policies*
3. *poking*
4. *punished*
5. *mainstream*
6. *confidentiality*
7. *reputation*

Key words B:

1. *regulated*
2. *abuse*
3. *chit-chat*
4. *productivity*
5. *liable*
6. *discrimination*
7. *misused*

Exchanging information and discussion

The students should rejoin their original partner or group to exchange information about the texts as well as explain the key words they have found. Monitor closely and, after the pairs/groups have completed the exercise, ask some individuals to share their opinions with the class.

Idiomatic language

At this point, make sure each student has a copy of both Article A and Article B, i.e. the whole article.

There are eight pieces of idiomatic language – four in each half of the article. The students should match the idioms with the explanations about their meanings and then find and highlight or circle them in the text. Finding them in the text will enable them to see the idiomatic language in context.

Key:

1. g; 2. e; 3. a; 4. b; 5. h; 6. d; 7. c; 8. f

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Teaching and learning strategy: Idiomatic language

Many trainers are still undecided as to whether they should explicitly teach idioms or not. On the one hand, learners tend to like them as they bring an element of fun and creativity into the lesson. On the other hand, idioms may be difficult to understand if there is no comparable expression in the learner's own language and, if they are used incorrectly, can cause the learners to appear 'amusing' or 'sweet'.

Most trainers do agree that if the learners have dealings with native speakers of English they will not be able to avoid idiomatic language completely. If nothing else, the learners should be able to understand what is being said or asked of them. So, a passive understanding of the most commonly used idioms will undoubtedly be of benefit to them.

There are many resources on the internet that provide meanings for idiomatic business language. To find them, simply type 'business idioms' into a search engine. Many of these are 'stand-alone' exercises, though. Without a context, students are unlikely to be able to use the idioms correctly in the future. Therefore, tasks that involve finding idioms in business reports, letters, speeches etc (especially when relating to their own field of work), and highlighting and trying to understand their meaning through the context will very likely prove more useful than teaching idioms for the sake of teaching idioms.

Business scenario: An inter-departmental meeting

There should be a minimum of four students for this scenario. Any number between four and eight students should work well. You may add one or two additional roles if appropriate for your teaching situation (e.g. for a factory, you might want to add a role for a production or warehouse manager). Cut up and hand out the role cards, ensuring that the cards with the lowest numbers are distributed. Give the students time to make notes and prepare themselves for the role. Then hold a meeting to discuss the topic.

Students who are less confident in speaking could take the minutes of the meeting and then provide a summary afterwards. As this is the first meeting on this subject, it is not essential that the students reach a decision. However, each student must be given the chance to state their position and give their opinion. It may help if the Chair sets a time limit on the meeting.

Extension task

Ask students to write a report of the meeting for their boss. This task could be given as homework.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

More on this topic

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics, go to the following lesson plans in the Business skills bank and the Business tasks series on onestopenglish:

Business skills bank: Socializing in English
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=58025&docid=154578>

Business tasks: Changes
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=157232>

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Article A

Key words

Before you read the article, match the key words from the text with their meanings.

punished poking reputation confidentiality policies banning mainstream

1. saying officially that someone is not allowed to do something _____
2. plans or actions agreed on by a government, political party, business or other group _____
3. making contact with someone on a social networking site such as Facebook _____
4. made someone suffer because they did something against the company rules _____
5. considered ordinary or normal and accepted or used by most people _____
6. a situation in which important information must be kept secret _____
7. the opinion that people have about how good or how bad someone or something is _____

Should networking sites be banned from work? by Vicki Sussens-Messerer

NO!

- 1 Millions of workers have now joined social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, where they conduct part of their private lives online. The number of people using these websites is growing at a huge rate. This creates some interesting problems for the world of work.
- 2 Rather than simply banning social networking sites at work, employers should make sure they have policies that cover their use, so that there are no unpleasant surprises for either employer or employee if things should go wrong.
- 3 While employers have the right to stop staff from using social networking sites at work, a total ban is an overreaction. Sensible employers should realize that their staff spend many of their waking hours at work and should be trusted to spend a few minutes of their lunch break "poking" their friends or making plans for outside work.
- 4 Employees are paid to do a job, and it is not acceptable for someone to spend hours on such networking sites when they should be working. However, policies that have been decided on together with staff can spell out what will, and what will not, be allowed. Few firms are clear about what they expect from employees who use social networking sites. A number of employers have punished staff for their online behaviour.

5 Work is a major part of our lives, and staff have always discussed aspects of their jobs in private with their friends and family. Now that networking of this type is more mainstream, many of these private conversations are written on the web and are potentially searchable by the public. Employers may have concerns about confidentiality or reputation damage, but in most cases they should not overreact by attempting to stop staff from using such tools to help organize their personal lives. Working together with staff and their unions to develop a sensible policy (for both online and offline private lives) would prevent problems from arising at all.

6 Cracking down on the use of new web tools is not a sensible solution to a problem that is only going to get bigger. It's unreasonable for employers to try to stop their personnel from having a life outside work, just because they can't get their heads around the technology.



BRENDAN BARBER is the general secretary of the national British trade-union organization TUC (Trades Union Congress), which is based in London.

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Should networking sites be banned from work?

Article B

Key words

Before you read the article, match the key words from the text with their meanings.

liable regulated misused productivity discrimination chit-chat abuse

1. officially controlled by means of rules or regulations _____
2. the use of something in a bad, dishonest or harmful way _____
3. friendly conversation about things that are not very important _____
4. the rate at which goods are produced, especially in relation to the time, money and workers needed to produce them _____
5. legally responsible for something _____
6. unfair treatment of someone, often because of that person's religion, race or sex _____
7. used in the wrong way or for the wrong purpose _____

Should networking sites be banned from work? by Vicki Sussens-Messerer

YES!

- 1 Social networking sites are brilliant but, as the name suggests, only for social situations – not for work. Even in firms where they are regarded as useful tools to promote the business, their use often goes far beyond normal business communication.
- 2 The growth of electronic communication such as email, mobile phones and the internet has greatly assisted business. However, their use in the workplace should be strictly regulated by employers to avoid abuse.
- 3 An employee attends work to earn his or her salary. Their time at work should be spent dealing with the job requirements, which means giving their whole effort and attention to the job at hand. Work is not a place where money can be wasted on meaningless social chit-chat. This has no benefit to the employer and costs businesses millions of euros in lost productivity. Social networking sites should be reserved for one's free time, which is precisely what they were developed for.
- 4 There is no such thing as a quick five minutes on a social networking site. By its nature, it draws one in. One can easily lose 40 minutes or even an hour while checking for emails and messages and following online friends, as well as replying to various messages.
- 5 Employers should introduce a strict policy regarding the use of emails, the internet and personal phone calls. They

should spell out precisely what use, if any, is allowed and then monitor it by checking employees during their daily duties.

The risk to employers can be huge if emails, social networking sites and contact through the internet are misused by employees to the extent that employers could be indirectly liable for acts of discrimination.

The argument that personnel should be allowed to use these sites at work because they promote good relations between employer and employee does not hold water. The sad fact is that, with human nature being what it is, employees will always stretch to the limit any concession made by employers, so that even limited access will soon be misused because of the very structure of these sites. Facebook, for example, has games on its site, which can take up huge amounts of time – time that is being paid for by the employer.

The use of such networking sites in the workplace is an abuse of the employer/employee relationship, and it costs business a huge amount of money in wasted time and lost productivity.



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3 Exchanging information and discussion

In your original pairs or groups, exchange information about the articles by summarizing the reasons given by Barber and Mooney to support their opinions. Who do you think makes the best argument? Who do you personally agree with more?

4 Idiomatic language

Match the idiomatic phrases (1-8) with the explanations and meanings (a-h). Then find and highlight them in the article.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. waking hours | a. to put limits on someone or something; to become strict about enforcing rules about someone or something |
| 2. spell out | b. to understand something |
| 3. crack down on something | c. if an opinion or a statement does not do this, it can be shown to be wrong |
| 4. get one's head around something | d. to attract you and hold your attention and make you want to spend time there |
| 5. the job at hand | e. to say or explain something very clearly |
| 6. draw one in | f. to take people's tolerance and acceptance as far as you can |
| 7. hold water | g. all the time that you are not asleep |
| 8. stretch something to the limit | h. the task that needs doing at that moment in time |

5 Business scenario: An inter-departmental meeting

Your company is holding an inter-departmental meeting to discuss whether to allow employees access to networking sites during work hours. Read your role card and take five minutes to make additional notes before you start the meeting.

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Role cards: An inter-departmental meeting



1. Chair / Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

You may have an opinion of your own but your main task during the meeting is to remain neutral and keep order. You should also make sure everyone has the chance to voice their opinions.

2. Sales and Marketing Manager

You think that social networking sites are great and are a fabulous promotional tool for your department.

3. Information Technology (IT) Manager

You think social networking sites belong to daily life and are nothing more than a modern way of communication. Your only worry is that employees may accidentally download viruses, etc.

4. Head of Accounts

You have been working at the company for 30 years. You strongly believe that employees should not be allowed to make personal phone calls or use social networking sites while they are in the office.

5. Human Resources (HR) Manager

You are responsible for the many young trainees and apprentices. You know they go onto social networking sites during their work hours but it keeps them happy so you don't mind as long as they don't overdo it. Professionally, you also use social networking sites to get background information on potential new employees.

6. Research and Development (R&D) Manager

You use social networking sites all the time as they are a great way of finding out what other companies are planning to do. You think everyone in your department should have unlimited access to the sites during work hours.

7. Head of Customer Services

You think that employees should have access to social networking sites at work but only in their break times.

8. Administrator

Your task is to take minutes (make notes on what is said during the meeting). After the meeting you can read your notes back to the people who attended the meeting.

