

When in doubt about your social media posts, do the Billboard Test.

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Hate speech, harassment, prejudice or discrimination of any kind, fake news, religious extremism, nudity, overt sexual content or pornography, violence. If you're unsure about the integrity of the social media content you initiate, posting, like, share, or forward, then do the Billboard Test. So suggests leading South African legal expert on social media law, author and CEO of The Digital Law Company, Emma Sadleir, at a recent conference hosted by Glacier by Sanlam.

Understand the social media landscape

Google's definition of social media is "websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking". If you think about it, that's basically the whole internet. So, it pays to know the power of social media and the impact it can have on your life, your relationships, your business and your job.

You might think that you're not really a participant on social media as you don't have an Instagram, Facebook, Twitter or Tik Tok account, but social media includes WhatsApp, and very few people are not active there, Emma points out.

People have become relaxed about posting on WhatsApp, even on work WhatsApp groups. The social media laws apply here too. Digital content is dangerous, says Emma. Once we internalise that fact, we become circumspect about what we post and consume on social media and importantly, who and what we follow.

If you are the administrator of a WhatsApp group, you are responsible for the content posted there, and it is your responsibility to 'Delete for Everyone' content that is in any way dubious and to disassociate from the person who has posted it. You could be held legally responsible if you don't.

Would you post it on a billboard?

We have all become 'digital'. We all engage on social media. We text, post, tweet. We belong to

groups on Facebook and WhatsApp. What's important to know is that we can become complicit in perpetuating nefarious content, sometimes unknowingly, says Emma. If we don't speak up or withdraw ourselves from groups when we are uncomfortable about what we're seeing in our feed, we are participants in the content that has been posted there. This is the digital equivalent of guilty by association. And let's not forget there is no real privacy on social media. Once content is created and sent, even to one person, it's treated as any other publication.

The Billboard Test is really simple, says Emma. If you would not place the content in your feed on a physical billboard with your face, name and your company's logo attached to it, then delete it or disassociate yourself from it. Immediately.

Some takeouts from Emma's presentation:

1. People will Google you – clients, colleagues, even people you have just met.
2. Looking after your personal brand involves being careful about what you post about yourself and what others post about you.
3. Nothing on the internet can truly be deleted.
4. Warren Buffet's quote: It takes 20 minutes to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it. On the internet it takes 5 seconds to ruin your reputation.
5. Freedom of speech and expression is not an absolute human right. It is balanced against the rights of others to privacy and dignity.
6. Online content is treated by law, just as any other published content would be.
7. Always be sure that what you are posting is true or for public benefit.
8. In terms of their civil capacity, children as young as seven can get sued – for bullying, cyberbullying, defamation etc.
9. A digital native is a person who has never lived their life without an online one.
10. Confidentiality must be taught.
11. Chain of publication must be understood to avert the pitfalls of posting online.
 1. Forwarding content, even if you are not the originator of that content, renders you responsible for that content.
 2. If you have the power to stop something from being published and you don't, you are legally responsible for it.
12. If you are the administrator of a WhatsApp group, you assume the responsibility to "Delete for Everyone" content that is posted by others.
13. In South Africa, children as young as 12 have criminal capacity when it comes to social media. This means that they are legally responsible for what they post, and that includes sexual harassment, gender violence, cyber bullying, defamation and so on.

Your digital footprint

How employable would you be if you were recruited solely on the merits of your digital footprint?

We know that people change, their views change, and they mature. However, on social media, what you posted when you were 17 can be taken into account by recruiters when you're applying for your dream job at 30.

Good digital hygiene

Here are a few of Emma's tips:

1. Be a good human. What are you saying on social media, and does it bring you or your company into disrepute?
2. Check if your data (including your social media sites) has been breached on haveibeenpwned.com.
3. Don't post content that contains personal information. This includes your visa, boarding pass, vaccine information, driving license.
4. justdelete.me helps to delete your content and control the content you don't want associated with you on social media.
5. Don't post pictures of your minor children. Older children need to give you their permission to do so. Also, the more you post content of a personal nature, the less you may invoke the right to privacy.
6. Talk to your kids about what they post online. A reputation can be destroyed in seconds and the internet is forever.

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