

In doubt about your social media posts? Do the Billboard Test.

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 are initiating, posting, liking, sharing, or forwarding, then do the Billboard Test. So suggests leading South African legal expert on social media law and author, Emma Sadleir, at Glacier's recent webinar titled, Protecting your practice in a digital world.

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.

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.

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, anyone can do anything they like with it. Also, if you don't like what people are posting or feel uncomfortable to speak up, leave.

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. She cites many examples of posts – images, videos, memes, tweets, quotes – that people either initiated or forwarded (sometimes innocently), for

whatever reason, that landed them in serious legal and reputational hot water. In extreme cases, hefty fines were imposed, jailtime served, jobs were lost, contracts denied, endorsements withdrawn, reputations shot. And whether you're the initiator or a participant, the law doesn't necessarily make a distinction.

In South Africa, children as young as 14 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? When something is posted on social media, it's there (and can be accessed), pretty much forever. 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.

Regarding privacy, there is almost none of it on social media, and the more senior you are in a company, the less privacy you can expect. It's best to assume that every pic ever taken of you will go onto the digital billboard.

Good digital hygiene

If we assume that digital content is dangerous, we need to understand our place in relation to it and how to mitigate the danger. 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](https://www.haveibeenpwned.com).
3. Don't post content that contains personal information. This includes your visa, boarding pass, vaccine information, driving licence.
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 get caught with your pants down. Literally.
6. Don't post pictures of your minor children. Older children need to give you their permission.
7. Talk to your kids about what they post online. A reputation can be destroyed in seconds and the internet is forever.

[Emma Sadleir's social media tips](#)

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