

Information Overload

Issue 77, August 2009

Welcome:

Welcome to the August edition of IEA's e-zine "Information Overload". This month we take an insider's look into the social media networks and how these sites can have an impact on your record keeping abilities and the problems of keeping your information secure.

We hope you enjoy reading. Have a great week.

Lorraine Bradshaw
Marketing Coordinator and Projects Manager

In this issue we will look at:

- The problems of social media and record keeping
- Downsides to Social Media
 - DDOS Attacks, Hacking, Crashes and Mysterious Disappearances
 - DM's and Closed Networks
 - Getting rid of the evidence
 - Not everyone has access
 - SPAM and Viral Infections
- So what does all this mean with regards to E-discovery in the face of social media?
- A Thought to ponder

The problems of social media and record keeping:

If you are part of a growing band of professionals who blog and use social media sites to promote your service, interact with clients and customers and otherwise discuss your work – you face many issues and problems with regards to record keeping, and retention and disposal of those "records". This month we take a look at some of the issues.

Downsides to social media:

DDOS Attacks; Hacking, Crashes and Mysterious Disappearances:

A few weeks ago there was a Distributed Denial of Service attack on the micro blogging site "twitter". It was around that time, my 4,000 plus "tweets" (individual messages) disappeared. I had used the site to promote work I was doing at home and for Information Enterprises, and pass on interesting links to sites and stories in the Information World, as well as tell the world and whoever was watching – what I was doing at any particular time. However, rather foolishly (as it turned out) I deleted most of the original messages from whence these interesting bits n pieces had come from, thinking I could use Twitter as a sort of archive for

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them. For those of you who don't know Twitter and don't understand what it's about – it's not about the messages per se, so much as the community of people you interact with to discuss everything and anything. So whilst I can re-find most of the informational links I had posted, I can't re-create the conversations. My fault for not backing up the tweets I suppose (and yes there are archiving tools apparently – I just hadn't had the time to find one that would serve my needs and use it). Now, please bear in mind, my use of Twitter and other social media sites is not “directly” related to the business of IEA, rather the work behind the work, and the marketing and promotion of work I am doing. So – yesterday for example I posted a message that said “research for an article on e-discovery in the face of social media” – and of course I shall follow that with a link to the posted article when it is completed.

Oh and by the way – if you want to follow me - my profile name link is... <http://twitter.com/ellegb> but DM (Direct Message) me so I can follow you back.

As you can imagine, social media sites can sometimes fall prey to their own success. In the very early days of Twitter for example, the creators could not keep up with server space and demand for the services. The early adopters would get the ubiquitous fail whale notice, too many times in a short space of time and off they would go to find another (perhaps more stable platform). And so began the proliferation of social media sites, such as plurk, bibo, tumblr, hi5 and a zillion others.

In an attempt to keep up with the many that litter cyberspace I joined about a dozen sites – which one(s) would be the best ones to market our services through? Which one(s) would provide the best opportunities for interaction and networking? Thankfully at the same time, multi-posting sites were also born. Send your message into a multi-stream posting service and have one message appear on all the social media sites – one minor problem solved. The main problem with multi-stream posting is this – you can't see what your readers are saying about you, which means you can't engage and you can't build a community of people to talk to, discuss ideas and any of the other unique reasons for being part of the social media scene. This does mean you still need to log onto the individual sites occasionally so you can see who is following you, and to see if they are worth following back – it's all very well posting messages, but the interesting things start to happen when we get into conversations with like minded people, and information can be shared.

But like all things, some of the wannabees disappeared into silicon heaven. Of the first dozen sites I logged onto, and created a profile for – about half remain. So what of your profile and posts? Well they may be around somewhere, but unless you have a backup copy of your posts and your conversations – you will never get them back once the organisation has turned off the server. In record keeping terms this is a real problem when it comes to retaining messages in context and satisfying the retention and disposal requirements under law for business related messages. As for your profile information – this can be a major headache if you gave “real” information – this is now sitting somewhere and you can't access it. Is it any wonder we hear of so many identity thefts and not just of social networking accounts? Say for example, you use the same user name and password for each account – and one of them is “hacked”. A little bit of work by the would be thief and your entire online presence is compromised – if you use your “work” address and personal information – you can imagine what kind of field day your imposters will have when they crawl through the open doors and mooch around inside trying to find ways to extract the greatest amount of information.

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DM's and Closed Networks:

Direct Messages cannot be seen by the open community. One thing I have failed to mention is this – when you post a message (in this case Tweet) – it goes not only to your personal archive – but also to the public timeline. The public timeline allows anyone who doesn't want to join, to read the messages as they are posted...assuming you can keep up of course. Individual "tweets" can also be searched allowing like minded people to find you – this means your network doesn't have to be just people you currently know, but people from across the globe you happen to share a common thread or two with.

DM's of course, are between you and whoever you are talking to. So if you want a private conversation using the social media sites, you can. This causes immense problems if you are trying to keep track of the messages for record keeping purposes and legal reasons – which – if you are using the social media sites for business reasons – you should be.

Getting rid of the evidence:

And it's as easy as hitting the mark to delete button (trash can) for those messages you no longer want people to find.

But are the messages truly gone?

Somehow I doubt it. As we all know, unless the space is overwritten – most data can be retrieved, should you have the time, patience, money and the knowledge that there was something there to recover in the first place. Which makes me hope my missing tweets will somehow be found and restored so I can back them up. But you can almost guarantee the bits you want won't be returned, and the embarrassing ones will follow you around – like discarded gum sticking to the base of your shoe.

Not everyone has access:

At a recent Web 2.0 open forum, issues surrounding the use (or not) of social media sites was discussed. Given that majority of the attendees were from state and local government departments – the difference in attitude to the use of social media was interesting. Some government departments were given carte blanche to blog and tweet about their work and the work being doing within their departments, whilst others couldn't. Mention was made of organisations outside of the government sector who had lurkers (listeners) who made contact with people who were talking (usually in a bad way) about their products and services, so they could fix whatever the problem was. So, customer service was a major topic, namely can you use social media as a way of getting to and dealing with people who had used your service, or bought something from you and were not entirely happy? The answer was yes, with a question as to whether they would be able to keep up with demand.

Then there were the other members of the audience – who did not have access to these sites at all. Deemed frivolous and ways to waste copious amounts of time by those people who would use them. Discussion moved on to – guidelines and principles that would allow them to use the social media sites – under guidance from a regulatory body. And before you laugh, the UK have indeed issued a directive doing exactly that. Some organisations outside of the government sector also limit the websites, including internet mail services in an attempt to stop time wasting and of course the potential for downloading viruses and other nasties.

The Public Sector Forum network has put together a useful list of behaviour and etiquette

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guidelines for staff who participate. It contains links to company guidelines as diverse as the BBC, the US Navy and the IOC Olympic Athlete blogging policy.

<http://laurelpapworth.com/enterprise-list-of-40-social-media-staff-guidelines/>

As to whether the powers that be would be persuaded to open the gates is another matter, as we have discussed, there are many problems with social networking.

SPAM and Viral Infections:

With the growth of social media sites such as Twitter, so too did the people who wanted to leverage the sites for personal gain. Attempts at blocking these bots / people appear to be sporadic at best, as they re-appear quickly in another guise when their original accounts are shut down.

So what does all this mean with regards to E-discovery in the face of social media?

Given most organisations don't seem to be handling, or know how to handle emails effectively yet, what chance do we have with social media sites?

Given the arguments listed above:

- Use of Direct Messages and Closed Networks
- Easy deletion of messages
- Closure of social networking sites
- Use of "other" names in your profile

And so on, the problems are huge and only going to get worse – the question is – as record keeping professionals – will we ever be able to keep up?

With many thoughts

Lorraine

A Thought to Ponder:

"Twitter is not a classic web application. By itself it adds very little direct value to a new user. As a result many people leave Twitter before they extract any benefit and generally with a poor opinion of the experience."

David Warwick

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at training@iea.com.au. Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues' friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au with "subscribe newsletter" in the subject line.

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