



A passenger had boarded a plane and taken his seat, when he was told that, because of his size, he was a safety risk and would have to take a different flight.

Understandably, the passenger felt humiliated especially as this had happened after he'd boarded the plane and in front of the other passengers.

He took a picture of himself seated on the plane and posted it on twitter so that his one and a half million followers could see what was happening to him.

The airline apologised, but suffered considerable reputational damage as the incident captured the public's imagination, the tweets went viral, and it ended up being reported in the press.

Social media has changed the way we communicate and send messages to each other and this can have implications for our professional lives – so this is social media and work, by what you need to know.

Before social media when someone thought they'd received poor customer service, they told, on average about 10 people.

Nowadays they are also likely to use the different social media platforms, to post images, videos and comments about how they've been treated to hundreds, thousands and sometimes millions.

These can be extremely damaging to the organisations and individuals concerned, and the people who make these posts can be held accountable if they make defamatory comments or what are called malicious falsehoods.

Many people think of social media as something personal and nothing to do with work. But let's look at two cases which ended up in employment tribunals.

An employee was dismissed for posting detrimental comments about his employer and damaging the firm's reputation. The employee claimed that he'd been unfairly dismissed, **and** he had freedom of expression rights. The tribunal found that the employee had agreed to the firm's social media policy which explicitly dealt with this type of post, and had



therefore broken his agreement, and also that the comments he made were not the type that are particularly important to free expression. The employee lost his case and his job.

Another example involves the manageress of a pub who, after receiving verbal abuse from some of her customers, posted derogatory comments about them online.

At the disciplinary hearing, the manageress said that she knew this was against the company's social media policy, but felt this was acceptable as she'd set her privacy settings so that only 40-50 of her friends would see the post. Well, it turned out that they were available to many more people and, as the issue had been reported by a customer, it was considered that the posts weren't private and she lost her case, and job.

Although it's a good idea to check privacy settings, once something's on the internet, it can be hard to control. Screenshots can be taken, and so called friends can share or repost your comments to a much wider audience.

Some companies are using social media to vet new job applicants. In a survey, 63% of companies said they review candidates' social media footprints as part of the recruitment process. In another survey 58% of applicants said they would be angry, very angry or outraged if an employer refused them a job on the basis of social media research.

There are all sorts of potential problems with this practice, especially around equality and diversity legislation, but one suggestion to make things a little better is that if employers do vet their candidates in this way, then they let them know that they do this, and give candidates the chance to change their privacy settings, and clean up their pages if they want to.

Another tricky area is the ownership of contacts, usernames and followers. Look at this example. Steve was asked by his employer to build up a network of influential contacts on a social media platform as part of his job. Sometime later, Steve left the firm and got a job with a competitor. So who owns these contacts now? They're Steve's contacts and they're in his name, but he was paid by his old firm to get them. Should his new employer be able to use these contacts? There's no



clear answer to this except that if possible, it's best to think ahead and agree what will happen in this sort of situation.

There are numerous cases where the reputation of an organisation, and the people who work there, have been severely damaged through online posts, and many of these may have been justified. However, we all have bad days and do things we later regret. So here are some things you can do to help protect yourself.

Be aware that your customers use social media and could let their feelings be known about the treatment they've received with comments, images and videos to back up their stories.

Find out about your social media policy at work. Your organisation may not have one yet, but they're becoming more common as they let everyone know what's acceptable, and what's not.

And perhaps, just as with email, before you send or post anything which might be offensive, take a moment and consider whether you'd be comfortable if it was held it up in front of you and your colleagues?

With the growth of social media we've become used to exposing all sorts of information about ourselves, and others, to the rest of the world, often without thinking.

The lines between personal and professional communications are sometimes blurred and *social* media can find its way into the work or public domain. And once it's there... you can't always get it back.