



COMPANY TIME: A worker uses the internet to log onto the social network site Facebook.

EAST ANGLIA

Does Facebook fit with your work?

Updating your Facebook profile has joined drinking tea, forwarding joke emails and gossiping around the water cooler as an essential office activity - so much so that it was threatening to bring a council's internet connection to a halt.

Suffolk County Council has joined the growing list of organisations which ban social networking sites like Facebook, Myspace and Bebo on work computers. In East Anglia, public sector organisations in particular now mostly ban the sites or limit their use to lunch breaks. And Norwich City Football Club had to ban the sites in work hours after some staff were caught spending too much time online.

Facebook allows members to keep in touch with their friends, share pictures and even join groups with names like "Facebook Addicts" and "Facebook is preventing me from doing any work". It has grown massively over the past year and has 8.5m UK users.

Suffolk County Council had been allowing its staff to use Facebook at lunchtimes, but so many were doing so that it was causing the internet connection to slow down and the council was in danger of exceeding

By SARAH BREALEY

its bandwidth, or the amount of data transfer that it pays for.

A spokesman said: "We banned it because the network bandwidth was running at close to capacity because of people using social networking sites at lunchtimes. It was making the internet slow. Rather than spending taxpayers' money on buying more bandwidth, we decided to ban the sites instead."

Facebook users can even use a Norwich City Supporter add-on to the site, but not in working hours at the club, which bans such sites between 9am and midday and 2pm and 5pm. The club's IT manager Steve Sheen said: "We had some complaints internally that people were using it too much. In some areas of the club it was being heavily abused."

But he said the club was planning a new policy in which some Facebooking will be allowed in work time, at the discretion of department heads. "It seemed a bit draconian to block it altogether."

Alister Christman, from Norwich-based IT consultancy Blue256, said: "Most of our customers, I would say about eight out of 10, have a product

in place that stops staff from using sites like that. Some people have something that allows them to look at them in lunchbreaks or for up to an hour. I have certainly done reports for customers who are concerned about it.

"People think 'I will just check my email or go on Facebook' and before they know it a lot of time has passed. Employers think it is taking productivity away."

Norfolk County Council does not block sites like Facebook but asks staff not to make personal use of websites within the hours of 9am to 5pm, including lunchtime. Staff at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and Norfolk Police are blocked from using such sites, as well as other popular sites like Amazon. The James Paget Hospital allows personal internet use, but limits it to 30 minutes or less.

Among Norfolk's other large employers, Virgin Money and UEA staff are allowed to use Facebook in work time, while those at the Norwich and Peterborough Building Society are not.

Visit the EDP Myspace page: www.myspace.com/easterndaily press

COMMENT - Page 18

ATTLEBOROUGH

Surgeon warns of US-style healthcare

An American-style healthcare system will soon be on the cards if the government continues to privatise the NHS, a surgeon warned a pensioners' conference in Norfolk yesterday.

Giving her personal views at a conference examining issues affecting the elderly, Anna Athlow accused the government of privatising the NHS "bit by bit" over the last eight years.

"If there is no action to halt these changes the NHS as a publically funded service will be no more," said Mrs Athlow, who is based at a north London hospital. "The government is determined to run hospitals like businesses... Unless we can stem the tide we will be looking at an

American-style healthcare system before long."

Asked if people would soon have to pay for hospital treatment, Mrs Athlow told the conference in Attleborough that she was aware of documents circulating in London hospitals mooting the idea of charging a £10 fee for accident and emergency care.

Other speakers at the conference organised by the Eastern Region North Pensioners Association included Harold Bodmer, director of adult social services for Norfolk County Council.

He said that from April social services would be offering independent care budgets more widely, enabling people to have

greater choice and control over how their care is delivered.

He also highlighted difficulties in recruiting carers in parts of Norfolk and Suffolk, saying: "Being a carer is not an easy job and it is not well paid. We need to look at this in partnership with the independent sector and the NHS and we need to promote the role of social care."

Dorothy Gibson, vice president of the National Pensioners Convention, discussed pensions. She said: "There is a crisis in social care and this is impacting not only on our members but on their relatives."

"We have got to reach out and say 'there is a campaign and you can join it'. Join us in the fight for the state pension."

NORWICH

King's Head is a top pub

The King's Head in Norwich's Magdalen Street was last night voted the area's top pub by real ale aficionados.

The Norwich & Norfolk branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) hailed the range of speciality beers, friendly welcome and "comfortable traditional surroundings" of the King's Head, which has won the award for the second time in three years.



The Camra branch chose between eight finalists. There were three from the county: Queens Head at Earsham, Swanton

Morley's Angel, The Lighthouse at Walcott; and five in Norwich: The King's Arms, King's Head, Eaton Cottage, Wig & Pen and The Trafford Arms.

The pub will now be pitted against the west Norfolk branch winner, the Fox and Hounds at Heacham, for the title of Norfolk Pub of the Year.

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