

TIME THEFT – AN EPIDEMIC

Once upon a time employers only needed to worry about personal phone calls and long lunches to determine lost productivity in the workplace. With the advent of the Internet, E-Mail, Cell Phones and Social Media the potential for lost time has become much more critical. While most employees hopefully limit this usage to their lunch breaks there are those whose addiction to Texting, Messenger Services, Facebook, Twitter and such leads to substantial lost time on an everyday basis.

I've recently been involved in a number of programs to try and curb this waste but it is not easy to accomplish. Most companies start with policies whereby certain programs are banned from company computers. This can work but some users will install and then hide the programs so that they are not immediately obvious to the untrained eye. Going into the Control Panel and Add/Remove Programs on Windows XP or Programs and Features on Windows 7 will alert you to the fact that these programs have been installed.

Program usage can even be reinforced by defining user accounts as limited which prevents users from installing any software. The downside to this is that an administrator must do all of the installations but a side benefit is that virus attacks are limited as well.

Similarly, certain web-sites can be declared off limits but many users know how to clear their browsing history and cover their tracks. To counteract this many companies install Internet Tracking Software that centralizes Internet Usage Statistics. An employer can tell how much time a user spends and on which web-sites. The more sophisticated programs can even block certain web-sites should they become a problem. This can be done for individuals on even companywide if it is deemed necessary to counteract the problem.

CELL PHONE USE ON COMPANY TIME

Even if company policy and computerized monitoring and restrictions are in place there is no easy way to control Cell Phone usage. New Cell Phones are now, in effect, Internet ready computers capable of doing almost anything the company computer can do. As such, you can commonly see individuals spending abnormal amounts of time texting and browsing the web on their cell phones.

Beyond instituting company policies regarding cell phone usage there is little an employer can do to monitor this. There is no legal way to monitor or block cell phone operation within a place of business and unlike company computers, which are the legal property of the company, you cannot request a user's phone to determine the degree of usage other than when authorized in a criminal investigation.

Ultimately, companies and employees need to come to some sort of reasonable understanding that cell phone usage should be on an emergency basis only with the exception of lunches and breaks. Any other usage should be clearly defined as against company policy in most circumstances.

While this is not practical for cell phone use, a periodic audit of company computers may be warranted to determine if users are in violation of company policy regarding the use of programs not designed for business usage.

We offer this service as part of a semi-annual check-up where we perform the following:

Document and remove unnecessary software.

Check Anti-Virus / Anti-Malware Status, run Scans and document Scanning Results.

Delete temporary files, clean the Windows Registry, defragment and optimize the drive. .