



Facebook Timeline design update a trap for employers, job seekers: Workplace expert

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Employers and employees alike have been warned to tread carefully around Facebook's latest design upgrade, which completely changes the look of individual profile pages and allows users to find content from several years in the past much easier.

While the upgrade has been welcomed by many, legal experts say the easier navigation shouldn't be taken as an invitation by employers to completely vet a candidate's history through Facebook.

Joydeep Hor, founder and managing partner of employment law firm People & Culture Strategies, says the new design is "superficially quite attractive".

"The fact you can go back in time with this latest design means you're further increasing the scope of problematic discoveries," he told SmartCompany this morning.

Hor says employers may be attracted to searching through Facebook profiles now because the ability to search through a candidate's past is so easy – but he says the dangers can outweigh the benefits.

"Looking at a social networking profile is certainly going to give you more insight into aspects of a person's life, background, social circles, and so on. But the danger arises that the issues you focus on are ones that would relate to attributes that could be the subject of anti-discrimination suits."

"If an employer takes issue based on photos they saw on someone's profile at the Mardi Gras, and they form a view that the person is gay, then that's going to create a big problem."

"These kinds of perils present themselves especially when you're going back in time."

The warning comes as a number of social media blogs and websites are warning users to look over their information carefully before they post it online.

Facebook itself has even given users an option to look over their profile for seven days before it is upgraded to the new design.

"The new design is just a reminder that these things don't disappear," Hor says. "Just because a few years have passed doesn't mean everything you posted during that time has been erased."

"It's only recently that employees and employers have started to fully understand the impact of social media in the workplace. It's critical that both groups understand how this works and be informed about the expectations around this sort of social networking."

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