

## HR toolkit Smartphones



# Mobile workers: keep control of the phone fiends

Everybody has a smartphone these days and ever-increasing functionality means they are a tempting – sometimes dangerous – distraction **Words Rob Gray**

In 2015, Ofcom headlined the press release to its annual Communications Market Report: The UK is now a smartphone society. It's hard to disagree. And needless to say, the trend towards greater smartphone usage has continued since.

A year later and Ofcom's 2016 research found that 71% of UK adults own a smartphone – outstripping laptop ownership, and up from 66% in 2015. It also concluded smartphones are the most widely used device among adults for accessing the internet. Almost everyone seems to be carrying around a shiny Samsung or Apple handset and unsurprisingly, penetration is highest among younger adults. More than nine in 10 under-34s own a smartphone.

It's often said that today's average smartphone is more powerful than the computer NASA used to manage the moon landings. Establishing the accuracy of that claim is best left to the technical boffins. But what cannot be argued against is that the range of things we can do on a phone has changed out of all recognition in recent years, from efficient online shopping, to sophisticated banking apps, to engaging games.

And that is before we get on to the subject of social media. The mobile phone has become the most popular device for accessing social media. Again according to Ofcom, adults aged under 45 spend most of their social media time on a smartphone. Add phone calls, text messages and the like into the mix and it's plain how big a role mobiles play in our daily lives. The key



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Bespoke HR

problem is this makes it much easier for people's personal lives to intrude into the workplace, with potentially negative implications for productivity, health and safety and team spirit.

“It is common practice to have a ban on mobile phones on the shop floor,” says Alison King, director of Bespoke HR, an HR consultancy and outsourcing business. “It's not only a distraction, it's a health and safety issue – and could be a dangerous one. Putting an effective mobile phone policy in place, which either bans or limits their use, will protect both your business and employees in the long term.

“If you allow staff to use mobiles you risk breaching health and safety regulations. For example, if some workers are required to wear protective clothing, such as ear guards, then allowing them to use a phone would essentially mean the removal of such clothing.”

## Increasing awareness

George Thompson, joint managing director of recruitment company Harrison Scott Associates, says one of his clients makes the point that the government has recently increased the penalty for using a mobile phone while driving, on the basis that the distraction it causes heightens the risk of fatal accidents. So why should using a phone while operating heavy machinery be any different? Media coverage of these more swingeing driving penalties has increased public awareness of the dangers, making it easier for employers to get across

to staff points relating to the impact of mobile phones on safety.

However, Thompson says another print boss he has spoken to believes it is impossible to ban mobile phones in the workplace altogether. Although many feel you should leave your personal life at the door before entering the workplace, in his view that is unrealistic. People have elderly parents and young children. Emergencies do arise and being cut off from contact with them may cause more worry and less productivity anyway.

“Many of our clients provide lockers for employees to store their personal belongings, including mobile phones, while working,” says Thompson. “Each team therefore has a landline telephone on the wall ensuring a means of contact in case of emergency, but stopping workers being tempted to check phones and social media updates while working.

“One client has a rule which may at first appear counter-productive: throughout the day, they offer employees the chance to take breaks, only lasting a few minutes, but long enough to check their phones, stretch their legs, and refocus. Seeming questionable at first, this in fact is a great idea as it increases productivity while lowering the risk of accident or mistakes due to distractions and concentration overload.”

Richard Fox, plant director at Tradeprint in Dundee, takes the view that mobile phones are a “hazardous distraction” that can take a team member's eyes and mind off the task in hand, thus increasing the





# HRtoolkit



It's not just about employees being distracted by their connected devices, inappropriate phone use on the shop floor can be a real hazard. Below is our cut-out-and-keep guide to drawing up a mobile phone policy

# Mobile phones



## Issues to address in a phone policy

### Getting started & general points

- Draft a policy addressing all the key areas and issues.
- If you don't have an HR department, you can enlist the help of an outsourced consultancy or expert.
- You can find policy templates from HR industry bodies such as CIPD.
- Remember to include rules about all visitors (such as contractors, customers and suppliers) within the policy.
- To make staff aware of the policy, include it in the onboarding process when recruiting but also make sure the rules are clearly displayed around your site and in reception areas.
- Be clear that if employees choose to bring their personal mobile phones in to work they do so entirely at their own risk.
- Spell out that you will not accept any responsibility or liability for a mobile phone which is lost, stolen or damaged on company premises or during work time.
- Make sure your policy is clearly worded so that it is evident to employees what the company considers to be acceptable and unacceptable use of mobile phones at work.
- A policy is worthless if it's ignored. Check compliance and see if there are any points which are disregarded regularly.

### Health & safety

- Your mobile phone policy should be linked to the overall company health and safety policy.
- The policy will apply differently to individual members of staff. What is acceptable will likely differ between those on the shop floor and office staff/management. You should spell this out.
- Be clear that employees are not permitted to use a hand-held



mobile phone when driving a company vehicle. Highlight this as a zero-tolerance breach of health and safety and make it plain that the company will not be responsible for any civil or criminal liability resulting from an employee being caught using a mobile phone when driving.

- Obvious though it is, the downloading by an employee of offensive, discriminatory or obscene language or images to their company phone should be expressly forbidden.
- Consider the wider implications of a mobile phone ban, such as an emergency on the shop floor. How will staff communicate if an accident occurs?

### Productivity

- The scope of the policy should relate to all forms of communication, including, but not limited to, phone and video calls, text or picture messages, emails and instant messages.
- Make clear that 'use' of a mobile

phone also includes accessing the internet, for any purpose.

- Office staff should not keep their mobile phones on their desks.
- If employees do bring their mobile phones into work they should be stored in a safe and private location, such as a handbag, jacket, drawer or locker.
- If your policy allows for office staff to make personal calls, indicate that these should be kept to a minimum and that they should certainly not affect an employee's work or that of their team.
- Some employers operate a 'bring your own device' (BYOD) approach. The government has published useful guidance on maximising the business benefits of BYOD while minimising the risks. This is available here: [bit.ly/byod-phone](http://bit.ly/byod-phone).

### Security & confidentiality

- Strictly prohibit workers from taking photographs or filming videos on company premises at any time, unless specifically permitted.

- Even if staff are not aware of the ins and outs of any client confidentiality agreements, they should be encouraged to behave as if a non-disclosure agreement is in place for every job – to avoid work being leaked to the detriment of customers.
- Employees should also be made aware that there will be serious consequences for any disclosures of confidential information regarding the company, its business or operations.
- Sharing of any information must not breach data protection rules.
- If staff have been issued with a company mobile, ensure they know who to contact and what to do if a device is lost or stolen; in order to minimise the impact of data loss/theft, staff must feel confident that they can quickly report incidents without fear of landing in hot water.
- Think about how you want to handle backup and restore of company data held on smartphones. This is a sensitive area and it's important to keep in mind that many workers store personal data about family and friends on their devices.

### Social media

- Ideally you will have a separate social media policy, which your mobile phone policy will be linked to.
- Breaching confidentiality on social media is a cause for disciplinary action. If a breach is severe, it could result in termination of contract.
- Any social media posts must always be respectful to the company, other members of staff and customer and suppliers.
- Only authorised staff should be permitted to post content to official company social media accounts.