

# Banned from networking

Is it right for organisations to impose a blanket ban on use of networking sites at the workplace, asks Vandana Ramnani

When Sangeeta Gupta, 26, a software engineer, tries to log on to her office computer to chat with friends on Facebook, she is welcomed with a pop-up that gently reminds her not to use it during office hours. She is, however, allowed to surf websites from the common internet kiosk while taking a break.

Several companies are beginning to restrict the access their employees have to the internet. While many do so out of fear of data leaks, security and compliance issues, others fear loss of productivity and virus attacks.

Interestingly, however, there is a school of thought that believes that such policies can alienate employees and even stifle innovation at the workplace. Efforts directed at building employee engagement and trust could be thwarted. Many say social networks help companies recruit better, identify competitive intelligence, source subject-related expertise online, help showcase the company better, build brand recognition etc, then what's the hype and hoopla all about?

Studies say young employees don't want to work in companies that block networking sites, not because they wish to have fun but because it's through such sites that they communicate and interact with people - that's a way of life for them.

An ASSOCHAM report says employees access social media for personal and business use equally, spending 30 minutes on an average on both activities each day. About 80% of Orkut and Facebook users working in IT companies see no harm in visiting online dating sites during office hours as they say it helps them beat stress.

In fact, even in the creative industries such as media or advertising, accessing the net

## TOP STORY

might actually help employees de-stress, says Ronesh Puri of Executive Access, a headhunting firm.

Here's what some companies are doing about networking sites. At Anthelio Business technologies, use of the net depends on the kind of work you do. Harjeet Singh Khanduja, the global HR head, says, "We are in the business of healthcare and have to protect client information. So, we need to restrict use due to security issues. Use of networking sites is not allowed in the environment-protected health zone." There are, however, internet kiosks where employees can check their emails, he adds.

An employee with the company, Acha Sowmya, says she's not affected by the company's decision and believes that she comes to office to work and "not to Facebook."

Pritpal Singh, director, human resources, Max Bupa, says his company provides access in a limited but not restrictive manner. "We only allow employees to view sites that relate to their business or work," he adds.

Rajita Singh, head, HR-Broadridge Financial Solutions (India), which works in the banking and financial sector, says her company does not allow access to networking sites due to information security issues. There are, however, kiosks on each floor where employees can access the net to take a break.

At Cigniti Inc, there is no blanket ban on networking sites but a few sites have been blocked due to virus attacks, says Sriram Rajaram, executive vice president. "I do not believe that 98% employees should be punished

## YOUTH CONNECT

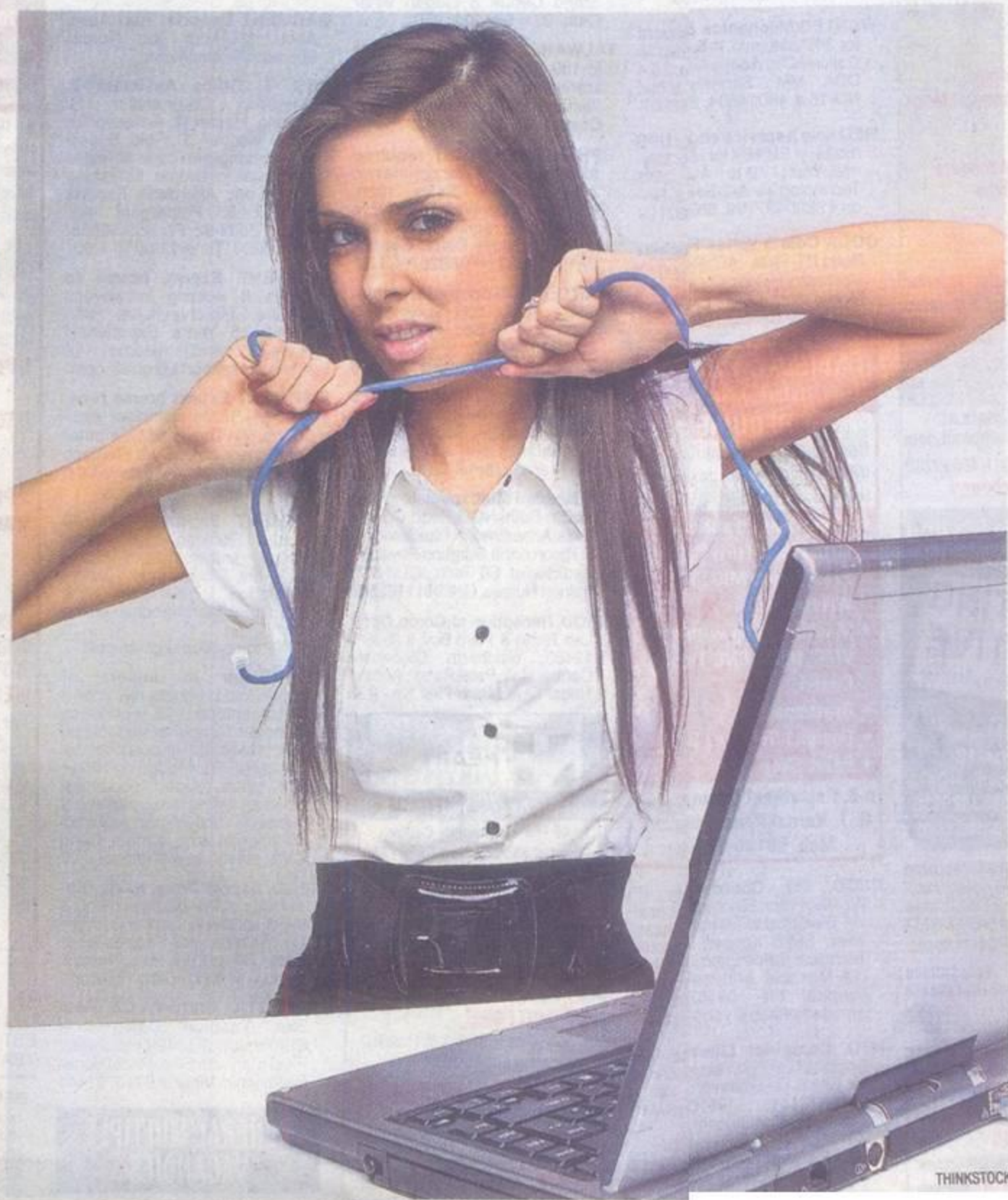
- The need to stay connected is so important that 59% of college students want their future employers to be flexible and open-minded about internet usage and understand that they have to be connected to work and personal life at all times
- According to the Cisco Connected World Technology Report, the new generation is not willing to compromise on anything, be it social media or bringing their own devices. They expect their employers to give them unhindered access to the internet as well as the freedom to use their own devices for both personal and work-related purposes

for the acts of the remaining 2% who waste their time on networking sites. We encourage our employees to use networking sites while at work as long as it is not detrimental to their work or project."

Many companies use these networking sites to gain competitive intelligence - if 100 people get added to the LinkedIn account of a competitor, it is sure sign that the competitor is growing or for that matter if the competitor's CEO's status suddenly changed, it means that he is leaving and it's time to poach.

"We do not proactively provide access to all sites. However, if it is required for doing your work better, an employee can raise a request and gain access to the websites," says Manuel D'Souza - chief human resource officer at Intelenet.

Many employees do not believe in any restrictions. "We do not monitor employees, in fact we do not even have a formal atten-



dance tracking system. We believe our employees are the best judge of what they need to do. We believe that networking is required for being productive at the workplace," says Dr Pallab Bandyopadhyay, director, HR, Citrix Systems.

Sapient India believes in an environment of openness, which in turn ensures a high level of trust and empowerment at all levels. "We believe our people are prudent enough to know and do what is right and whom to approach if they have any doubts," adds Anil Verghese, internal communication lead.

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