

# Blogs

A UK employee has been sacked for writing his thoughts about the company in a 'blog', causing a discussion about the right of free speech. Should companies draw up guidelines on what employees can write about them?

1 What is a 'blog'? Have you ever read one? Do you write your own 'blog'?

2 Complete the Fact Box below by circling the correct figure.

FACT BOX: Blogs	
Number of blogs worldwide	50,000 / 500,000 / 5 million
Number of people in US who read blogs	12 million / 22 million / 32 million
% of US internet users who write blogs	2% / 5% / 7%

3 Check your answers to exercise 2 by scanning paragraph two of the article.

**Bloggers and the company** An employee who has been blogging for 12 years has just been sacked by a Waterstone's bookstore in Edinburgh, Scotland for criticising his employer. In his weblog, or blog, he wrote negatively about his boss. This has started a discussion about the rights of individual free speech. In another case in the USA last November, a flight attendant calling herself Queen of the Sky was fired over a photograph of herself which appeared on her blog, where she wore her Delta Airlines uniform. She is filing a discrimination complaint.

There are more than 5 million blogs or online diaries, and the number is growing. In 2003, Blogger, one of the first companies to produce easy to use blogging software, was bought by Google, the leading web search company. The word entered the Oxford English Dictionary last year. A recent US poll reported that 32 million people say they read blogs, and 7 per cent of Internet users in the US write blogs.

People blog for many reasons. An ambulance driver in London writes a blog about his work, because he thought people would be interested in what happens in an ambulance. It gets about 4,000 hits a day. His blog is anonymous. Many people use their blog to complain about life at work. This can create problems for companies. Unhappy employees can now share their complaints with millions across the Internet.

This is such a new phenomenon that employee codes of conduct are not particularly clear about blogs. What happens if bloggers use company equipment and time? 'Perhaps blogs can be good for companies' suggested one manager. 'They can respond sensitively to employee grievances.' One thing seems sure; companies now need to accept that the world is moving on and make guidelines which take into consideration this ever more popular practice.

4 Read the whole article. In your opinion, should the employees have been sacked?

5 Look at the following words connected with personnel. Use some of them in relation to your own company.

(to be) sacked    to discriminate    (to be) fired    a complaint    code of conduct    grievance

6 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- (a) Should people be fired for writing negative things about their employer or company online?
- (b) Should employees have the right to use the Internet at work for private purposes?
- (c) Do you think that companies need to clarify what employees can and cannot write in a 'blog'?
- (d) How can companies use 'blogs' to their advantage?