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### Keeping a Closer Eye on Employees' Social Networking

By JOSHUA BRUSTEIN

A service released earlier this week by Teneros, an online communication services company, makes it much easier for companies to keep tabs on their employees' social networking activities.

The software, called Social Sentry, will automatically monitor Facebook and Twitter accounts for \$2 to \$8 for each employee, depending on the size of the company and the level of activity being monitored.

It has always been possible, of course, for employers to look at what their workers are posting on social media. It is an increasingly common activity for human resources departments vetting prospective employees. But there was a measure of privacy afforded by the sheer amount of information online. Automating the process makes it more likely that monitoring will become commonplace, say both those who approve and those who disapprove.

Social Sentry draws only on publicly posted information on Facebook and Twitter; the company plans to add YouTube, MySpace and LinkedIn by this summer. The company is marketing the product as a way to watch for the release of confidential or embarrassing information and to measure how much time employees are spending on social media during work hours.

But what employers decide they want to look for is up to them, said Matt Weil, the company's chief executive. "We only provide the application and software," he said. "It is the companies that decide what to do with it."

As cases involving mischievous workers for Domino's Pizza and an indiscreet Israeli soldier have shown recently, people's social media activity can come back to haunt their employers.

Employers are looking for better control. The American Management Association and the ePolicy Institute do an annual survey of companies on their approach to digital media, and more than 60 percent of the companies that responded in the most recent survey said they had some social media policy in place. Like e-mail, employees' social media creates a trail that could be used in litigation, said Nancy Flynn, the executive director of the ePolicy Institute.

"You definitely want to take advantage of your legal right to monitor," Ms. Flynn said.

Unlike corporate e-mail accounts, however, social networking isn't clearly of the working world. While it is publicly accessible, many users see it as an informal and intimate form of communication. And well-documented confusion over privacy settings means that some information is being made public without users' knowledge.

Lewis Maltby, president of the National Workrights Institute, a research and advocacy group, called the automatic monitoring of social networking a "disaster," and predicted that it would lead to people being fired for online griping, the airing of political views and other innocuous conversation. There is a tendency to react to an off-color joke or complaint that appears online more harshly than to the same comment made in a cafeteria or company picnic.

But he also said that there is little recourse for those whose social networking activity gets them in trouble.

"I'm a privacy advocate, and I wouldn't stand up before Congress and say your boss shouldn't be allowed to read your social networking sites," he said. "You're putting it out there for the world."