



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on August 6, 2009

Marines Fight Facebook, NFL Tackles Twitter

The Los Angeles Times reported on August 5 that the Defense Department is studying how to use social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter without compromising security. In a similar story, the New York Times mentioned on August 3 that the National Football League is clamping down on Twitter and text messaging.



Pentagon officials want to develop guidelines so that the military can benefit from social networking without exposing sensitive information, opening the door to malicious software, or taking up network bandwidth that is needed for critical operations. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman, as saying that “the study and policy recommendations, ordered by Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Lynn, are due in late September or early October.”

Whitman pointed out that while the department is waiting for the study to be completed, social networking will still be permitted. “We need to take a look at both the security aspects as well as benefits of the sites,” Whitman said. “So, it is a balance.”

The Marines, on the other hand, have banned Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter from government computers, though public affairs officers and others can apply for an exemption. “Social networking sites have always been banned from government computers,” said Lt. Craig Thomas, a spokesman for the Marine Corps. “Bandwidth needs to go to the operators.” But the ban does not apply to Marines who are using their own computers or the recreational computers found on military bases. Thomas explained: “What you do on your own time is your own business, as long as you keep to the Marine Corps ethos of honor, courage and commitment.”

The NFL has a similar concern that social networking sites should be used with a sense of discretion and decorum. According to the [Green Bay Press Gazette](#), Green Bay Packers’ Coach Mike McCarthy “told the team that any player caught tweeting during a team function will be fined the maximum of \$1,701.” Halfback Ryan Grant later used Twitter to spread the word that fans should “expect tweets in the morning before we go to work, possibly around lunch time and at night once we[re] done. I don’t want that heavy fine.”

Tony Sparano, the coach of the Miami Dolphins, has effectively outlawed Twitter. Nose tackle Jason Ferguson indicated that he had no desire to get into trouble, at least for the time being: “I don’t have an account. I was thinking about getting one until I got the information. O.K., won’t get it now. Can’t do it. I don’t want to get fined, not yet.”



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McCarthy and Sparano are among the growing number of coaches who are worried that players could innocently or intentionally reveal too much information about injuries, game plans, or other private matters. "Coaches did not have to look hard for an example," the *New York Times* noted. "After Minnesota quarterback Tarvaris Jackson sprained a knee ligament in practice Saturday, his teammate Bernard Berrian tweeted that he was out for the season. Berrian later said that he was joking, and Jackson was expected to miss only a few practices." Too late, the damage was done. The media love to pounce on such unsubstantiated statements as grist for the rumor mill.

Ultimately, concerns seem justified, as social networking allows the rapid and widespread dissemination of information in the few seconds it takes to type a brief message. Of course, any wise person will take social networking info with a grain of salt, and will also realize there are positive benefits to this kind of communication.

While there is no immediate need for generals and coaches to panic, the technology does put a new wrinkle on the old prohibition that a person shouldn't falsely yell "fire" in a crowded movie theater. Social networking is like yelling so loudly that people can hear you literally on the other side of the world. If people yell military or team secrets with that kind of volume, they ought to be held responsible for the consequences of their actions.



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