

Information Systems

10 Ethical Issues

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We look at codes of practice, policies and ownership of personal information, and see how they might relate to TradeBreak.

10.1 TradeBreak

TradeBreak is a monthly 40-page magazine containing just advertisements for local small businesses such as roof repairers, children's nurseries and plumbers.

A small business owner wishing to place an advertisement contacts TradeBreak Sales either in person, by phone or by e-mail. Wording, layout design and dates for inclusion of the advert in the magazine are agreed and the small business owner is billed.

The layout and content of TradeBreak is set up on Apple Macs by copy editors who are skilled in layout, making the material attractive and easy to read. On the next day after the copy deadline date, the copy is sent to print. TradeBreak has a printing press.

Paper, ink, staples and spare parts for the printing presses are bought in from suppliers as needed. Their own engineers service the paper cutting, stapling and printing machinery.

When the print run is completed copies of TradeBreak are delivered by van to members of the distribution team for posting in every letterbox in their area. Of course, TradeBreak contains an advertisement for itself, since it makes its money from those who place advertisements with them and the company wants to attract more customers.

The company works on tight profit margins and good financial control has helped them survive and thrive.

The company has 33 employees including three apprentices.

Members of the management team have been in printing all their working life.

10.2 Codes of Practice

A code of practice sets out what customers can expect from the company (and what the company expects of customers) in terms of equality, ethics, contracts, conflict of interest, duty of care, and so on.

TradeBreak might use the codes of practice shown below.

Confidentiality We are committed to maintaining the commercial confidentiality, and the protection of all personal information, of all our customers and suppliers, past, present and future.

Ethics We conduct our own business honestly and honourably, and expect all our customers and suppliers to do the same.

Duty of Care Our actions and advice will always conform to relevant law, and we always respect the human rights of our customers, employees, and people in the locality.

Conflict of Interest We will not divulge information about your company to any other company.

Fees Our fees are always competitive for what we provide, which is high quality, tailored, specialised service. We do not offer discounts because, by doing so, we reduce the quality of our service to you. We always state our fees and the basis of charges clearly in advance, so that our clients and we can plan reliably for what lies ahead.

Payment We do not charge interest on late payments, so we expect payments to be made when agreed. Our terms are generally net monthly in arrears.

Intellectual Property and Moral Rights We retain the moral rights in, and ownership of, all intellectual property that we create unless agreed otherwise in advance with our customers. In return we respect the moral and intellectual copyright vested in our customers' intellectual property.

Quality Assurance We maintain the quality of what we do through constant review of our work, with ourselves and with our customers.

Professional Conduct We conduct all of our activities with professionalism and integrity. We take great care to be completely objective in our judgement and any recommendations that we give, so that issues are never influenced by anything other than the best interests of our customers.

Equality and Discrimination We always strive to be fair and objective in our advice and actions, and we are never influenced in our decisions, actions or recommendations by issues of gender, race, creed, colour, age or personal disability.

10.3 Policies

A policy is a written plan of action to guide routine decision-making. It is a decide once, use many times strategy. Policies that might be adopted by TradeBreak include usage of TradeBreak's e-mail, Internet and computer systems, smoking, attendance and timekeeping, mobile phones, and health and safety. It is up to TradeBreak to ensure that each employee has a copy of the policies, perhaps by signing a declaration that they have received, read and understood them, as well as placing them in a defined area on the company's computer systems.

We expand on two policies by way of example.

E-mail, Internet and Computer Systems TradeBreak provides E-Mail, Internet and computer systems to help you complete your work. You cannot use TradeBreak's e-mail, the Internet and computer systems for personal use or amusement - to do so steals time and resources from the company. You cannot download any programs and store them on any computer or computer system - this reduces the risk of attack from hackers and minimises the risk of infection by viruses, trojans, and the like. You cannot upload any data or programs from TradeBreaks computer systems onto any media such as memory sticks - this is theft.

Open Door Policy Every manager's door is open to every employee. This means that employees may talk with managers on demand at any time about any subject.

The purpose of our open door policy is to encourage communication, frank and honest dialogue, and discussion about any matter of importance to you.

If any area of your work is causing you concern, you have the responsibility to discuss your concern with a manager. Whether you have a problem, a complaint, a suggestion, or an observation, your company managers want to hear from you. By listening to you, TradeBreak is able to improve its practices, processes, and decision-making, and make working with TradeBreak a pleasant and satisfying experience.

No matter how you approach your problem, complaint, or suggestion, you will find managers at all levels willing to listen and help.

By helping to solve problems, managers benefit by gaining valuable insight into possible problems with existing methods, procedures, and approaches. While there may not be an easy answer or solution to every concern, you have the opportunity at all times, through the open door policy, to be heard.

10.4 Ownership of Personal Data

Who owns the personal data, the data held on any company's computer systems and that can be used to identify you?

You do. But ...

" ... any personal information given or received in confidence for one purpose may not be used for a different purpose or passed to anyone else without the consent of the provider of the information. This duty of confidence is long established at [British] common law". (North Stoke Primary Care Trust)

However, you may (unwittingly?) agree to your personal information being passed on to someone else or used for another purpose - you need to read the small print. Check out the Privacy Policy for Brookes Chauffeur Services (www.brookeschauffeur.com/privacy) for example. By using their site and completing their online registration form, and by sending them e-mails, you are agreeing to your personal information being shared with unnamed third parties. Further, they state: "Brookes Chauffeur Ltd owns ... the personal information collected through the site ...". And different rules may apply to third parties. Further, "Brookes Chauffeur Services may amend ... this policy at any time".

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