

BUSINESS PROFILE

Technical hitch

Mark Heselton, partner in the family department, looks at how social networking sites like Facebook can break up a marriage

GONE are the days when wives searched for lipstick on their husband's collar. Evidence of cheating partners now comes from the complex communication networks we all enjoy. Quick, easy and informal, the world of computers, social networking sites and mobile phones have tempted many a spouse into unwise communications they have lived to regret.

The managing director of Divorce-Online recently said that 20 per cent of all petitions contained references to Facebook. While in our experience this is an overstatement, we have certainly seen this cited in petitions as evidence of improper associations, and it is easy to see why. What the sender may mean as an innocent joke or light flirtation may be read less innocently.

Mobile phones and texts can be similarly dangerous. The regular beep of arriving texts can be difficult to explain to a suspicious spouse. Going through your partner's text messages may be like reading their diary but this doesn't stop people doing it.

Unexplained multiple phone calls and text messages are now regularly cited in divorce petitions.

The communications network also allows people to relocate and reconnect with old flames. Friends Reunited has been blamed for the breakdown of numerous marriages with some middle-aged spouses re-igniting their passion for old school mates; there may still be the chance to go out with the dream girl you met at the student graduation party.

And then again there are the long-distance email relationships formulated over weeks and months of



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correspondence sometimes across continents without the drab interference of day-to-day life.

There are many pressures on the marriage at the moment and this intensifies things. I suspect a casual fling is more readily detectable than it was in the past. Marriages may be breaking up as a result of this. Perhaps those who stray should face the consequences but many would argue that what your partner doesn't know doesn't matter.

Instant communications do bring with it a record of what was said which may be accessible for years to come. The brutal truth is that if you don't want to get found out, don't write it down and don't press 'send'.

■ For further advice on any area of family law, contact our specialist Family Law Team. A fixed fee interview, that is not time restricted, can be arranged for £75 plus VAT by telephoning 020 8370 2898 or by emailing markheselton@vanderpumps.co.uk

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