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Vatican sets firewall for employees

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Revealing at least an ambivalence about technology, the Vatican has followed the splashy announcement of its new Facebook page with a new policy that bans Vatican employees from using the social networking site at work.

A new firewall blocking Facebook and MySpace are "normal and prudent" measures, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, a Vatican spokesman, told Catholic News Service. The Vatican network also blocks access to pornography, online gambling and any site that contains "inappropriate material," according to the message employees receive when they try to access the sites.

Admittedly, the Vatican is not the only employer to limit employees' access to the Internet. Most cite concerns about productivity. But a new study from the University of Melbourne in Australia found that people who use the Internet for personal reasons at work are about 9 percent more productive than those who don't. "People need to zone out for a bit to get back their concentration," study author Brent Coker said on the university's Web site. "Short and unobtrusive breaks, such as a quick surf of the Internet, enable the mind to rest itself, leading to a higher total net concentration for a days' work, and as a result, increased productivity."

Even Pope Benedict admitted that the Holy See needed to make greater use of the Internet after he lifted the excommunication of Bishop Richard Williamson, whose denial of the Holocaust on Swedish TV was widely viewed on YouTube. The pope said in a letter that Vatican officials should have searched the Web for information on Williamson.

YouTube was still available to Vatican employees, as of this week, CNS reported.

Or the employees can take a lesson from the people of Iran: There's always Twitter.

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