

*Research, analysis and opinion on international media law*

## UK announces landmark law to protect against harmful content



### Government introduces draft Online Safety Bill that imposes fines of up to GBP18m for harmful content online, and criminal action

The UK has introduced new laws to fine social media companies that fail to remove harmful content online.

The Online Safety Bill, announced during the Queen's speech in parliament on 10 May, also includes landmark measures to safeguard freedom of expression.

Under the new law, all social media companies will have a duty of care towards their users, including the youngest and most vulnerable people who use their platforms.

Communications regulator Ofcom will be given the power to impose fines of up to GBP18 million or 10 per cent of annual global

turnover, whichever is higher. Ofcom will also have the power to block access to sites.

The bill was published on 12 May and provides a new legal framework for identifying and removing illegal and harmful content from the internet.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden commented: "Today the UK shows global leadership with our groundbreaking laws to usher in a new age of accountability for tech and bring fairness and accountability to the online world."

Mr Dowden added: "We will protect children on the internet, crack down on ➔

## Florida law blocked by federal judge

A US district judge has blocked a Florida law that would fine technology companies that permanently bar political candidates in the state.

Federal judge Robert Hinkle issued a preliminary injunction on 30 June, suggesting that the law would be found unconstitutional.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed the bill on 24 May, in response to Facebook and Twitter's bans of former President Donald J. Trump on 06 January this year.

Earlier this year, Mr DeSantis said that big technology companies had "come to look more like Big Brother". On signing the bill, Mr DeSantis said the law would give those in Florida "guaranteed protection against the Silicon Valley elites".

In a 31-page order, Judge Hinkle wrote: "The legislation now at issue was an effort to rein in social-media providers deemed too large and too liberal. Balancing the exchange of ideas among private speakers is not a legitimate government interest."

Mr DeSantis plans to appeal Judge Hinkle's decision in the US Court of Appeals.

Commenting on the ruling, his office stated: "We are disappointed by Judge Hinkle's ruling and disagree with his determination that the U.S. Constitution protects Big Tech's censorship of certain individuals and content over others."

Judge Hinkle found the state law to be flawed as it targets only large companies.

Under the law, companies that remove political candidates from their platforms could be fined USD250,000 a day for state-wide candidates and USD25,000 a day for other candidates. ■

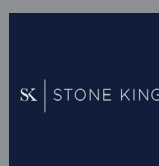
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## Apollo Global Management to acquire Verizon Media in a USD5 billion transaction

Private equity firm Apollo Global Management announced on 03 May plans to acquire Verizon Media in a USD5 billion deal.

Verizon Media will maintain a 10 per cent share in the company, which will be renamed 'Yahoo' at the close of the transaction.

Verizon Media comprises iconic brands such as Yahoo and AOL, as well as technology and media platform businesses.

Under the terms of the agreement, Verizon Media will receive USD4.25 billion in cash and preferred interests of USD750 million.

Commenting on the transaction, Guru Gowrappan, CEO at Verizon Media, said: "The past two quarters of double-digit growth

have demonstrated our ability to transform our media ecosystem."

Mr Gowrappan continued: "With Apollo's sector expertise and strategic insight, Yahoo will be well positioned to capitalize on market opportunities, media and transaction experience and continue to grow our full stack digital advertising platform. This transition will help to accelerate our growth for the long-term success of the company."

The deal is expected to accelerate growth of the internet and digital media leader.

The transaction is subject to closing conditions and is expected to complete in the second half of 2021. ■

## UK announces landmark law

← racist abuse on social media and through new measures to safeguard our liberties, create a truly democratic digital age."

Home Secretary Priti Patel said: "This new legislation will force tech companies to report online child abuse on their platforms, giving our law enforcement agencies the evidence they need to bring these offenders to justice."

The bill places the duty of care on social media companies and websites to ensure

they take rapid action to remove illegal and harmful content, such as terrorist material, suicide content, fake news and racist abuse.

As part of this duty of care, all social media companies will need to consider the risks their sites pose to the most vulnerable people who use their sites, and protect children from inappropriate content.

Commenting on the milestone bill, Dame Melanie Dawes, Ofcom Chief Executive,

## AT&T announces USD43bn merger with Discovery

AT&T has agreed to a USD43 billion merger with Discovery to create a premier stand-alone entertainment business, to be one of the largest global streaming companies.

The deal, announced on 17 May, combines AT&T's WarnerMedia with Discovery's leading nonfiction and international entertainment and sports businesses.

The merger is expected to form a new company with significant scale and investment resources, with projected 2023 revenue of approximately USD52 billion.

David Zaslav, President and CEO of Discovery, will lead the new company. Commenting on the deal, Mr Zaslav said: "It is super exciting to combine such historic brands, world class journalism and iconic franchises under one roof and unlock so much value and opportunity."

He added: "With a library of cherished IP, dynamite management teams and global expertise in every market in the world, we believe everyone wins...consumers with more diverse choices, talent and storytellers with more resources and compelling pathways to larger audiences."

AT&T and Discovery expect the deal to create substantial value for shareholders of both companies by uniting leadership teams and content creators, as well as accelerating both companies' plans for leading direct-to-consumer streaming services.

The transaction will also create at least USD3 billion in expected cost synergies annually for the new company. ■

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said: "Today's Bill takes us a step closer to a world where the benefits of being online, for children and adults, are no longer undermined by harmful content."

Dame Dawes added: "We'll support parliament's scrutiny of the draft Bill, and soon say more about how we think this new regime could work in practice – including the approach we'll take to secure greater accountability from tech platforms." ■

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# Law Firm Employee Wellness Strategy



## Law firm Stone King LLP introduces wellness strategy to support workplace wellbeing and prevent mental health issues within the firm

Law firm, Stone King LLP, has transformed its employee wellness strategy to prevent employee burnout and mental health issues within the firm, supported by workplace wellbeing experts at Wrkit.

The Mindful Business Charter member organisation, which has always emphasised the importance of mental health, has expanded its focus on wellness through appointing wellbeing champions, earmarking May as “Mental Health Month”, giving everyone an extra day of paid leave on SK

Appreciation Day (04 May) and implementing a holistic employee benefits package. Stone King's benefits offering is complemented by healthy workplace advocate Wrkit.

The platform gives employees financial perks, mental health and workplace wellbeing courses, and the chance to win prizes. The platform also allows Stone King's HR department to analyse data on how employees are using it to gain an overall indication of wellness within the firm.

Since introducing Wrkit in July 2020, Stone King has seen a 100% uptake of employee benefits with the lifestyle savings, wellbeing and recognition offerings proving most popular.

Throughout the pandemic, the law firm has worked to assist its 250-strong workforce with increased communication, and heads of teams are regularly advised on how they should be supporting team members in both professional and personal capacities.

As a result, more than eight in 10 employees (83%) agree that leadership has been strong and visible throughout the pandemic.

Stone King has offered regular social virtual events, such as quizzes, craft classes, 'Tea & Talk' sessions, HIIT classes and a drag artist-hosted bingo night to prevent employees from becoming too isolated.

This was done with a no pressure to join approach to respect staff's downtime as mandated by the Mindful Business Charter.

The annual engagement survey proves the value of Stone King's focus on employee wellness, with 96% of employees saying they believe they make a valuable contribution to the success of the organisation and one employee saying: “[Stone King LLP has] a strong sense of culture, understanding and community. It feels like the values promoted really flow throughout the business, whereas with other companies it feels like the cultural values are afterthoughts.”

Tassy Vincent, HR Director at Stone King LLP, said: “A culture that normalises long hours and pressure, eventually leading to mental health issues and burnout, is all too common in the legal industry, but that is just not us.

“The lawyers at Stone King do people-focused work – charity, social enterprise, education, business and private clients, so we wanted to keep this idea of social responsibility at the heart of our values and ensure it includes our own employees.

“When we joined the Mindful Business Charter, we began to tackle these issues, but as we have placed more emphasis on a holistic employee wellness strategy, we have seen real results within the firm.

“Our collaboration with Wrkit has been an important part of revitalising our benefits offering. In our Feel Good Friday weekly post we take the opportunity to promote the benefits; from money-saving perks through to practical online wellbeing exercises, such as Pilates and meditation.

“Our people have been given the tools to choose what elements they need to support their own wellbeing and personal development. The recognition module is gaining traction, encouraging peer to peer recognition in line with our Core Values. Wrkit has made an excellent partner as our two companies share very similar values relating to employee wellbeing, recognition and support.

“The drive for wellness awareness has proved so popular with employees that we have extended our Mental Health Awareness Week activities to span across the whole of May. ➔



# Law Firm Employee Wellness Strategy



← We have wellbeing champions and engagement representatives who will be helping to inform us on what support our people need and want from the HR team as we take our Agile Working approach further to more fully incorporate hybrid working, which will be really useful."

Jason Brennan, author and Director of Wellness and Leadership at Wrkit, said: "There's a stereotype that lawyers have to work themselves day and night until they are keeling over with exhaustion, so it has been incredibly refreshing to work with a firm that is challenging this idea."

"Creating a healthy, positive working environment is the first step in creating a happy, healthy and motivated workforce and it takes more than simply a gym membership, for example, to achieve this."

"The incredibly impressive, fully rounded strategy devised by Stone King should be regarded as an example for the wider industry and we are proud to play a part in it."

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