



How to Develop Your Company's Social Media Guidelines

Many of your most valued employees are already using social media, so why not encourage them to share and promote the values of your company on these sites? At the same time, you must help ensure they're protecting the privacy and integrity of your company. Company policy should apply when your employees are engaged in social media for work purposes and at work, but also during their own personal time.

1.) What Should Be Prohibited?

Employees should be prohibited from engaging in any discussion that pertains to discrimination, sexual harassment and company or client secrets. Employees should avoid participating in any discussion that belittles or ridicules the value of the company's product or service or any discussion that involves name-calling. Remind employees that any abuse of company policies, both online and offline, may lead to termination.

2.) What Can Be Positively Discussed Online By Employees?

The company should encourage employees to participate in social media. It's a great medium to promote your service, product, brand and workplace. Companies can use social media to talk to potential customers, while customers can use it to share their experiences. It's also a useful venue for customers to share experiences. It's a great place to find the people who like your company. Consequently, employees must respect the people they're talking to. They must be knowledgeable and courteous when discussing the company. They must also be transparent by using their real names and stating the name of the company.

3.) What If All My Employees Don't Understand Social Media?

If you don't already have a "social media director," we suggest that you ask a qualified volunteer to teach the rest of your staff about social media. Due to generation or seniority gaps, there may be some people who are not as familiar with social media. A class on social media can be a great morale booster for the team.

4.) Should The Social Media Policy Be Pertinent To Every Social Media Channel?

Yes, and it's a good idea to specify what those channels include and to frequently update the list of approved sites. Currently, the most popular mass-appeal channels include blogs, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter. Your employees and customers are likely using many popular social media applications, which encourage the sharing of conversations, texts, images, slides and videos.

5.) What Are The Initial Steps To Take When Developing A Policy?

The first step: Don't call it a policy. Call them "guidelines." The next step is to invite your staff members who are engaged in social media to help you formulate the guidelines.

Get their advice and suggestions. Ask them what they want and tell them what you need. Employees adhere better to guidelines they've helped develop.

6.) Will The Company Be Monitoring Employees' Posts And Profiles?

Since there is no privacy in the social media arena, the company should plan to "listen in" on all conversations about the company through the various social media monitoring programs that are available. This is a good business practice that enables the company to participate in the conversation with customers and potential customers.

7.) How Long Should The Company's Social Media Guidelines Be?

There is no rule. Some of the best guidelines are the shortest. The most important factor is that everyone understands them and that the guidelines encourage participation and discourage any negative actions that would bring harm to the company or its employees.

8.) Should Companies Allow Participation In Social Media For Personal Use At Work?

You'll have to set your own rules on this one. Some business categories restrict or limit "personal social media." Some businesses, such as restaurants, may not allow videos taken of the kitchen. The best way to tackle this issue is to meet with your staff and have them help you set the guidelines.

9.) If My Staff Is Participating In Social Media At Work, On Behalf Of My Company, What Should They Be "Talking" About?

It's important to make sure your staff is engaging in interesting and valuable discussions. Without sounding like a commercial for the company, they may post about product benefits in "everyday situations," special offers, interesting facts, share insights, tips and tricks, as well as share insights, respond to questions and invite suggestions.

10.) Some Of My Staff Members Are "Social Media Gurus." How Can I Tap Into Their Expertise?

Simply talk to them. The generation utilizing social media has an open perspective on global communications. Brainstorm to explore ways to grow your company using social media. Get customer feedback and build and maintain a community of fans.

By creating social media guidelines, you'll take an important step in navigating this changing media landscape. You'll give your employees clear guidance about what kind of online behavior is encouraged and what kind of online behavior is prohibited. And by empowering them with this information, your employees can become online ambassadors for your brand and company.

Contact Jason Mudd, APR
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for more information.



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Template for Developing Your Company's Social Media Employee Guidelines

Now that you've read our suggestions, this template will help you create your company's social media guidelines. This template is a foundation that will help you determine your company's guidelines on social media use by and for your employees, both at work and at home.

Introduction:

<EDIT TO ADD YOUR OWN INTRODUCTION >

The following guidelines address the use of social media by the employees of <COMPANY NAME>. Although we highly encourage the use of social media, we wish to point out that, as an employee, you are required to adhere to the company's code of conduct.

<ADD MORE OF YOUR COMPANY'S PHILOSOPHY HERE>

Who Are These Guidelines For?

<EDIT TO ADD YOUR OWN COMMENTS>

These guidelines have been developed for employees of <COMPANY NAME> who engage in social media and mention our company and anything or anyone related to it, including our vendors and suppliers. Specific social media channels includes blogs, and content on, but not limited to, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and any other platforms that enable the sharing of conversations, text, slides, photos and videos.

Participating In "Personal" Social Media On Company Time

<EXPLAIN YOUR POLICY FOR "PERSONAL" BLOGGING, TWEETING, FACEBOOKING ETC. WHILE ON COMPANY TIME>

Unless your personal social media activities include something of value to the company, we ask that you <LIMIT OR REFRAIN FROM> these activities while on company time.

<COMPANY> Encourages You To Participate in Social Media

<EDIT TO ADD YOUR OWN PHILOSOPHY ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA>

When representing our company, please make sure you are "transparent" – reveal your true identity and that you are an employee of <COMPANY NAME>. When posting about our company, we encourage you to share content of value and of interest. This may include product benefits, testimonials, insights and interesting facts. The ultimate goal of social media is to make friends and create lifelong fans, whether they're for you or for our company. With that goal in mind, we encourage you to post regularly and have fun doing so.

Using Proper Judgment When Participating In Social Media

<EDIT TO ADD YOUR OWN COMMENTS>

We urge you to use proper judgment when posting about our company, our employees and/or our vendors. Our current code of conduct, which includes policies on sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying <FILL IN MORE AS REQUIRED>, is extended to include all online activities. Please respect our company's trademarks and copyrights, our confidentiality and any other proprietary information. Any discussion that belittles or ridicules the value of the product or service that the company provides and any discussion that involves name-calling or negative behavior damaging to that employee or the company could be a violation of our code of conduct and may lead to termination of employment.

<COMPANY>'s Monitoring Policy

<EDIT TO ADD YOUR OWN COMMENTS ABOUT MONITORING>

As there is little privacy in the social media arena, we use social media software to monitor topics and keywords that are relevant to our company.

And Finally,

<EDIT TO ADD YOUR OWN COMMENTS>

Many of you have been using social media for years, while others are still learning the ropes. We encourage you to teach other employees what you know. We also encourage you to use your social media expertise to help formulate new ideas for building our company and reaching out to customers locally and around the world.

Need help filling in the blanks and developing sound social media guidelines for your company? AXIA has a team of experts available to assist you and your company. Contact us at (866) 999-2942 today for more information or visit us at www.axia.net.

Contact Jason Mudd, APR
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