

# Add a social media policy to your employee handbook

by Margaret Jacoby



If your organization is forward-thinking, chances are it no longer regards social media as an employee distraction. Instead, you embrace social networking and blogging as an asset to branding, client development and service, research, recruiting and employee engagement.

But the use of social media can pose risks for a business when employees:

- Share confidential company information through Facebook, Twitter and other sites
- Disparage the organization or co-workers in a blog
- Post embarrassing videos recorded in the workplace on YouTube.

Social media represents a fundamental shift in how business is evolving. Employers need to establish clear expectations about what employees can and cannot post. That will help to minimize liability.

## What your policy should cover

Protect your organization by writing and publishing a social media policy in your employee handbook, and warn employees that you intend to monitor their use of social media. The policy should address:

- Divulging confidential information or proprietary intellectual property
- Criticism of supervisors, clients or co-workers
- Posting distasteful photos
- Illegal or inappropriate Web-based activity.

Reinforce that employees have no reasonable expectation of privacy when using company equipment or while on company time and that disciplinary will be taken for violating the policies.

The fact is, a social media policy doesn't just protect your business. A clear-cut policy lets your employees know what behaviors are acceptable and what behaviors could result in disciplinary action up to termination. A good policy can prevent HR disputes, ensure your reputation isn't damaged, improve revenue due to increased productivity and even keep your employees from violating federal law.

## 5 reasons you need a social media policy

If you don't have a social media policy yet, here a few reasons why you should consider creating one.

**1. Loyalty.** You pay your employees and provide them with stability, so shouldn't they be loyal to your organization? If they're making derogatory remarks toward your business on social media, they should be terminated for their disloyalty. Even if a post is made on the employee's own computer on his or her own time, you may have legal grounds for termination. *Tip:* Don't violate the National Labor Relations Act, which protects employee discussions about the terms and conditions of employment.

**2. Public image.** Many employees don't realize the impact social media posts have on the public, including your organization's potential customers. Just one negative post can lead to lasting damage to your brand.

**3. Clarity.** Employees are not mind readers. They need specific guidance that tells them what they can post and, more importantly, what they can't. Be specific and give examples of what isn't acceptable. Being vague could mean that you don't have a legal right to terminate, even if you feel the employee posted inappropriate comments.

**4. FTC considerations.** Social media policies don't have to just focus on the negative; they should focus on the positive comments, too. However, when employees promote your business via social media, they are required by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to disclose their relationship to you. Not doing so could violate advertising policies with the FTC.

**5. Wasted time.** Productivity can suffer when employees use social media at work. No business can afford to have employees spending their time on personal business. As long as they're on the clock, they need to be focused on the organization's business.

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