

**HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR COMPANY'S SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES:
The Eleven Most Critical Issues You Need To Address**

1. Does Your Company Need A Social Media Employee Policy?

The answer is yes. Most of your employees are already online "talking," so this is a great opportunity for you to encourage them to share and promote the values of your company. At the same time, it's important to remind them to protect the privacy, integrity and values of your company. Your policy should apply when your employees are engaged in social media for work purposes while at work, but also when they are participating at home and during their own personal time.

2. Specifically, What Should Employees Be Prohibited From Discussing Within Social Media?

Employees should be prohibited from engaging in any discussion that pertains to discrimination, sexual harassment and company confidentialities. Employees should also be prohibited from participating in any discussion that belittles or ridicules the value of the company's product or service and any discussion that involves name-calling or negative behavior that damages the employee or the company. The company will take any or all of these actions seriously and note that any abuse of its policies, both online and offline, may lead to termination.

3. What Can Be Positively Discussed Online By Your Employees?

Your company should encourage employees to participate in social media. It's a great medium to share and promote your company's service, product, brand and workplace. Social media is a great forum for talking to customers and potential customers. It's also a great venue for customers to share their experiences and for companies to improve customer experiences that may not have met expectations. It's a great place to meet the people who like your company and like doing business with you. Consequently, employees must respect the people they're talking to. They must be knowledgeable and courteous when discussing the company. In addition, they must be transparent by using their real names and stating the name of the company.

4. What If All Of My Employees Don't Understand Social Media?

If you don't already have a "social media director," we suggest that you ask for a volunteer to act in that capacity. This person will teach the rest of your employees about social media.

Due to age, generation or seniority gaps, there may be some people who are not as familiar with social media as younger employees. A company class on social media may be a great bonding experience and enhance company and employee morale.

5. Should Your Social Media Policy Be Pertinent To Every Social Media Channel?

Yes, and it's a good idea to be specific about what those channels include and to update them frequently as new platforms emerge. Currently, the most popular mass-appeal platforms include blogs, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter. Any forum that encourages a sharing of conversations, text, images, slides and videos is considered to be within the arena of social media.

6. What Are The Initial Steps To Take In Developing My Company's Social Media Policy?

The first step: Don't call it a policy. Call them "guidelines." The next step is to invite your staff members who are heavily 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 helped develop.

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

Since there is no privacy in the social media arena, the company plans 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.

8. How Long Or Short 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.

9. 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.

10. 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, respond to questions and invite suggestions.

11. Some Of My Staff Members Are “Social Media Gurus.” How Can I Tap Into Their Expertise?

Simply talk to them. The younger generation utilizing social media has a much wholesome perspective on global communications. Brainstorm with them to explore ways to grow your company using social media. They may have ideas about better ways to do business online, ways to get customer feedback and build and maintain a community of fans. Leverage their expertise. Their way is the “now way” of doing business.

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