



WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

Protect your company with an effective social media policy

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The use of social media has become extensive in the workplace, and as a result, workplace social media policies are gaining attention. Workers' continued exchange of "personal" information brings risks to employers. Examples include employees posting pictures of themselves contaminating food or pictures of company wrongdoing.

Learn to manage employees' social media use and understand its potential impact on your brand. All companies need a social media policy—even if the company has no social media presence—because your employees may be creating one of their own.

Social media issues created by employees can have a significant impact on business. A viral video of food contamination, for example, is reflected immediately in revenue. Companies don't always respond in their own best interest. One company, after discovering an employee had posted a picture of his paycheck along with derogatory comments on his private Instagram account, fired the employee. Few people likely would have seen the post had the company not fired the employee and thus generated its own negative publicity and legal risks. It's violation of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) to have a policy that prohibits wage discussions or to fire an employee for engaging in such discussions, even online.

Policies must not attempt to prevent employees from engaging in protected speech on their own social media sites or punish employees for making disparaging remarks about the company or their supervisors.

Developing a sound social media policy

Here are some things to consider when creating a policy on social media use for your company:

- **Reinforce the company complaint procedure.** Encourage employees to bring grievances to their supervisor before taking to social media, but recognize that an employee's tweets about how much she hates her job may be protected, depending on the context of the tweet.
- **Define what is considered confidential information.** Define what kinds of information your employees can and cannot share online. Spell out

whether employees need approval before posting certain types of information.

- **Explain the consequences of employees' online actions.** Increase employee awareness that social media doesn't occur in a vacuum. A post that was meant for just a few hundred Facebook "friends" can wind up on the front page of viral news site Reddit. Be specific about the consequences of what can happen if, for example, an employee posts a video of himself in his work uniform engaging in behavior that might cast him and your company in a negative light.
- **Identify a company spokesperson.** Designate someone who will be responsible for answering questions about your company on social media. Ensure that employees know whom they should refer questions about your company to online, so they don't answer themselves.
- **Discuss online behavior and etiquette.** Let employees know that it's OK to "agree to disagree" with others, especially on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, but it's essential to remain polite and professional at all times, just as they would in the workplace. Remind employees how quickly a comment can go viral on the Internet.
- **Address what is considered illegal.** Employees shouldn't engage in any illegal activity and should respect others' copyrights, trademarks, and intellectual property when they're online.
- **Focus on educating employees.** Having a social media policy is a start, not a solution. You should provide extensive training on the policy and attempt to ensure compliance through understanding. Your social media policy should be published as a separate document in addition to your employee handbook and should include a signature acknowledgment.

No policy can prevent all potential abuse from occurring. However, implementing a lawful social media policy and training your workforce will go a long way.



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