



HR Examiner

*Examining practical HR issues business owners
and managers encounter every day*

SOCIAL MEDIA or ANTI-SOCIAL MEDIA

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Ideas For A Social Media Policy

Here's a partial list of ideas for your Social Media policy.

Encourage your employees to:

- ▶ Use the Internet as a positive outlet for sharing the strengths of the organization, the services, the

Setting the Stage for Mediating Social Media

One of my clients recently asked me to develop a Social Media Policy for their organization. This was my first request for such a policy and I thought it might interest you as to what's out there regarding this new and not-so-new trend.

My sons introduced me to Facebook and MySpace years ago – which I humorously called FacePlate (at first because I couldn't recall the actual names). My concern then was that others could post inappropriate items to their pages or linked to their pages that could be detrimental to them. My concerns were based on knowing that employers use these tools as part of their employment selection process.



My concerns hit close to home. You may recall, a year or two ago, some inappropriate alcohol related photos of Eden Prairie (MN) High School kids made

benefits, etc.

- ▶ Share what they know - their expertise.
- ▶ Link with other related, important blogs, people, information
- ▶ Identify themselves as part of the organization when they're sharing their expertise.
- ▶ Respect the privacy of the organization and its customers. Don't breach confidentiality.
- ▶ Don't pick fights – present your perspective clearly and respectfully.
- ▶ Use a disclaimer statement: These are my personal opinions and don't represent the opinions of my employer

Remind employees:

Inappropriate alcohol-related photos of Eden Prairie (MN) High School kids made front page news as the administration used the photos to suspend the students for drinking. That scared many people – and educated people as well. It wasn't just employers checking out their applicants on the Internet, but schools checking out the behavior of students (when brought to their attention by others in the community). This was the same school my sons attended – yet it became a national issue.

We've come a long way since the first introduction of social media for kids and have watched – or participated – as social media has moved dramatically into the business world. Now with the active networking of business professionals with such programs as LinkedIn, Plaxo and Facebook, and the proliferation of personal and professional blogging, employers have cause for concern. On the flip-side, employers also have the opportunity to help enhance their public image and reputation with the encouragement of their employees' positive use of social media.

When I researched the Internet for Social Media policies for my client, what stood out first was IBM's approach to social media. Their policy encourages its employees to share their expertise and knowledge with others as a way to show the expertise IBM employees offer. Of course, there are lots of rules that accompany that philosophy, including linking their policy to IBM's Business Conduct Guidelines. But the key is their encouraging employees to educate the public with their blogs and related connections. This was common in other employers, the more research I did.

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What To Consider

▶ Employers have the right to monitor the use of social media regardless of whether it's at work or on personal time. This should be part of your computer policy as well as part of your ethics statement, relating to how an employee's actions outside of work impact work.

▶ That your policies on harassment and ethics apply to all forms of communication in and out of work.

▶ Their social media activities should not get in the way of their work productivity.

▶ Respect copyright and other laws.

Determine the right Social Media philosophy related to your business, its culture and its clientele, then communicate what

So, from an HR perspective, what should employers do?

It's probably time to check out what your employees are doing on the Internet – both at work and after work. I don't encourage that you truly spy on your employees, but most companies have difficulty monitoring employees' personal use of the computers during work time. If you think back, it started with the addictive game of Solitaire (once installed on all company computers), then broadened with surfing the Internet, and continues in a wide variety of forms.

At one of my clients' offices, we actually switched a "problem" employee's office to one where her computer screen faced the door. She was unaware of the reason for the change, since others were also changing offices. But it put an end to the problem. Her productivity improved dramatically following the move!

Social Media adds one more enticing distraction to employees as well as concerns for employers. Companies are worried that employees will speak poorly about their organization in their blogs and on-line interactions. They are also concerned that employees will include inappropriate communication that could be detrimental to the organization. For example: an employee might include that she's an employee at XYZ organization, then may also share an inappropriate joke or a link to an inappropriate site or make a politically incorrect statement. Someone could link the employer with the employee's action and in this litigious society anything could happen. Or a customer might see the two items and determine that XYZ isn't an organization they want to do business with.

So, while it doesn't seem like an enticing task, it may be time to look at what your employees are doing on the Internet and consider the many alternatives you have to protect your organization, without turning into Internet Police.

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works!

If you need help creating your Social Media policy or any other policies, feel free to call!

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