

January 27, 2016

GAVEL TO GAVEL

Social media: Pitfalls and practicalities

Recent statistics indicate most adults who use the Internet use social networking sites and at least half of the employees in the global workforce have posted online messages, photos or videos about their employer.

As such, it's likely that your business already has a social media presence, whether you want one or not.

While such a presence is an asset for many companies, without management and direction your presence may instead become a liability.

The foundation for management of this asset is an appropriate social media policy. This policy should express not only your company's social media strategy but also the roles of employees in executing that strategy.



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Starting with a clear, concise definition of what constitutes social media, the policy should provide information and guidance for the use of both company and employee resources with respect to that media and clearly distinguish between the two. For example, it should establish who owns the rights to various tools and information related to social media in the workplace, including company trademarks, copyrights, and other intellectual property. The policy should also work to protect the company, its customers and its employees by clearly defining what constitutes confidential, proprietary and private information – of the company, its customers, and employees – to ensure that such information is not posted inappropriately.

A good policy may also protect employees by prohibiting the use of social media for illegal, slanderous, harassing or discriminatory behavior.

As different areas of the company may become involved in the company's social media efforts, a social media manager should be assigned to oversee coordination and implementation of the policy. Even a part-time manager may improve the utility of social media by educating employees on their roles in promoting the company through social media.

As with all policies affecting employees, a social media policy is subject to various legal restrictions – be mindful of these when drafting and enforcing such a policy. Topics to consider include an employee's right to privacy regarding non-work activities as well as issues arising under the National Labor Relations Act.

A social media presence brings the potential for both benefit and risk. Clear and specific policies and educated employees may help to provide your company with greater management of both.

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