

Social Media Policy:

The How-To Guide For Managing Employee Risk And Brand Reputation Online

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WHAT IS A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY?

A social media policy is a corporate code of conduct that provides guidelines for employees who post content on the Internet, either as part of their job or as a private person.

A good corporate social media policy should educate your employees on using social media, both in a professional and personal way.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT BUSINESSES HAVE AN EMPLOYEE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY?

In today's digital age, everything is news. Consider the following facts in the context of a business, large or small, trying to capture brand exposure and control reputation:

36%

the number of smartphone owners worldwide is expected to reach 36% during 2018, having grown from just 10% in 2011 (Source: Statista.com)

2015

back in 2015, Ofcom stated that the UK was now a 'smartphone society' with the devices having overtaken laptops as the most popular way of getting online [Source: Ofcom.org.uk]

50-70%

of a buying decision is now conducted before a sales representative is involved

39%

of employees admit to having posted content about their employer without any encouragement

57%

of workers now consider 'social business' to be important when choosing an employer



These statistics show why employers need to consider the impact of their employees' social media use on their brand reputation: with so many people having easy and unfiltered access to a worldwide audience, it is increasingly impossible to monitor what is said about a brand and, of course, what's common sense to one user isn't common sense to another.

We live in transparent times where brand reputations can no longer be easily managed. Your employees are undoubtedly already social and that's without considering the influx of digitally-native millennials joining workforces around the world.

WHAT ARE THE KEY RISKS OF EMPLOYEES USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WORKPLACE?

So, with all this social activity, there are obvious risks to employers and their brands.

Unfiltered social media content is open to misinterpretation (or may be generated by an employee who has already misinterpreted a corporate message).

Culture, Politics and Religion, those once-taboo topics and now the heavyweights of the social newsfeeds, can play havoc with brand reputation if an employee chooses to comment or share them.



71%

of executives said their company was concerned about possible risks posed by social media

[Source: Grant Thornton]

HOW DO YOUR EMPLOYEES KNOW WHAT THEY CAN OR CAN'T SAY OR DO WITHOUT GUIDELINES?

Most employee engagement takes the form of internal communications that tells people about the vision and values of the business. Now, employees can mix what they hear 'officially' with what they read or see online. This information, which may come across as more genuine – or 'from the horse's mouth' – could unintentionally draw bad attention to the brand. At the very least it will create confusion around the corporate narrative. For example:

51%

only 51% of employees clearly understand and support the purpose and mission of the organisation

30%

fewer than 30% of employees report that they are being communicated with, listened to, and kept in the loop

17%

fewer than 17% of employees are satisfied with the frequency of communication from senior management

45%

only 45% of employees have a clear understanding of what they should and should not do on social channels when it comes to company-related topics

[Source: Weber Shandwick & KRC Research]

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These numbers show a corporate world crying out for better employee engagement. Introduce governance in the form of social media guidelines or monitoring to avoid problems being caused between corporations and their customers or partners.

Such statistics will almost certainly be behind sudden rants on social media; disgruntled employees choosing Facebook or Twitter as an outlet for their work-related frustration.

It's for this reason that, at Tribal Impact, we believe that companies need to take their social media guidelines a step further than governance or crisis management. There is an inherent opportunity in these scenarios: to move from employee engagement to employee advocacy and harness the power of the best network you'll ever have.

Which brings us nicely to the benefits.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EMPLOYEES USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WORKPLACE?

561%

“Brand messages reached 561% further when shared by employees versus the same messages shared via official brand social channels”

[Source: MSL Group]

It's simple really.

The average workforce has ten times as many connections as a company has followers and people are three times more likely to trust company information from employees than from the CEO.

[Source: Social Media Today]



Employees are perceived as more credible content sharers and they have loyal networks which gives them greater reach and greater influence. Quite simply, they are considered the more authentic voice of the brand and yet, many companies are missing out on the benefits of such a powerful internal resource.

The average workforce has ten times as many connections as a company has followers

KEY ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Opening paragraph

Outline why you're encouraging employees to actively participate in social media. Reinforce that these guidelines are there to help protect them as employees and the brand as the employer.

If you're building a wider employee advocacy program, explain why the brand is helping employees to develop their professional brand online – how it assists them and how their participation can support the brand.

At this point you should introduce the levels of program participation and point them to where they can get training so they can take their first step into social networking.

Consider making your guidelines conversational in tone and straightforward in approach – no social media jargon that may confuse or cause ambiguity.

Often employees are scared to mention their employer for fear of doing something wrong, so avoid scaring your employees further. Keep the guidelines informal; perhaps even “tongue in cheek”. Focus on actively encouraging employees to be transparent and enthused ambassadors of the brand.

Sshhhhh

Always make sure employees are aware of confidentiality when it comes to company and customer related information. You wouldn't share confidential content at a networking event and so you shouldn't share confidential content by social media.



Haven't I Seen That Before?

Be sure employees understand image rights, copyright, GDPR legislation and other legal constraints that may restrict their social media usage.

Be Nice

Make sure employees understand that they must respect their audiences and they must not be dishonourable in terms of racial, ethnic, religious or sexual slurs that may offend. Their professional brand will be tied to their personal brand and such commentary isn't acceptable in the office, so it has no place on social networking. It's not nice.



Leave It To The Legal Eagles

Don't disclose financial or legal information around customers or clients. Be sure that employees understand the boundaries of what they should and shouldn't be sharing. Remind them of their contractual obligations to the business when they became an employee and just emphasise that social media is no different to what they're already doing.

Move It Offline

Explain to employees that they should never commit the company to resolution – take it offline. It's not right or reasonable to expect employees to commit the brand to follow up on something specific without doing due diligence or further investigation. Just remind the employees of customer service protocols for dealing with complaints.

KEY ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Passion Is Healthy. Anger Is Not.

Emotions can run at a high when you're on social media, especially if you feel something or someone has been misrepresented. Spirited discussions are good. All out fights are not. We've all been there – that email that that winds you up on Friday night so you respond by hitting the keyboard with all your anger...then you walk away, return and re-write it. It's the same with social networking.

No Pseudo Identities

Social is about conversations and people like to know they are conversing with someone genuine and credible. Encourage your employees to be human, to be proud and declare who they work for. Identifying themselves and connecting to the employer

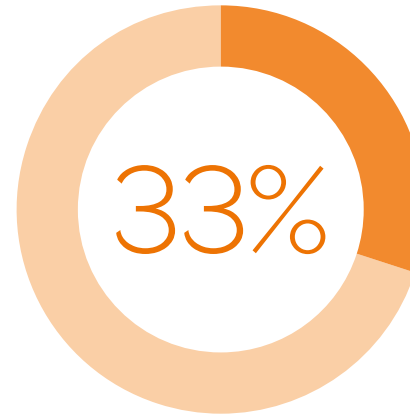
brand as an employee is good in terms of transparency and credibility. At the end of the day people are your brand. Encourage them to be proud of that association.

It's All About Me

Encourage employees to talk in the first person on social media. Social networking is what it says...social. A channel for discussions, conversations and networking. People don't have conversations with logos – they have conversations with people.

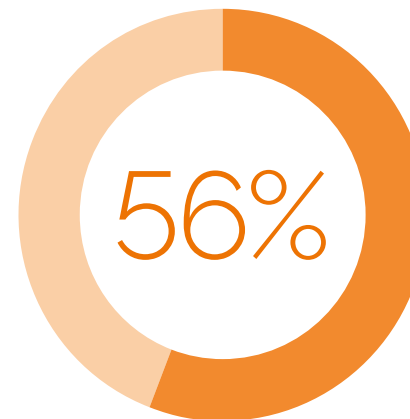
Be Helpful

Encourage employees to think about their audience and serve their audience. Building a community by adding value and encouraging their community members to engage is the right kind of usage for social media. No one wants to convert employees into marketing megaphones. Teach them to learn and share.



33% of employees post messages, pictures, or videos in social media about their employer without any encouragement from the employer

[Source Weber Shandwick and KRC Research]



56% of employees have defended their employer to family and friends or in a more public venue such as on a website, blog, or in a newspaper

[Source Weber Shandwick and KRC Research]



No one is perfect but if you use your best judgment and common sense when engaging on social media you won't go far wrong.

Oops...Now What?

Tell employees to be the first person to respond to mistakes. Don't leave it and wait. Tell them that if they've made a mistake on social media make some headway towards fixing it and setting the record straight. Still not happy? Contact the social media team.

What's Said On Social Stays On Social

This might be a good time to remind employees that the Internet remembers: so always pause and think before posting. If you delete that tweet, the chances are someone has already retweeted it or shared it. You deleting it from your twitter profile will not delete the shares that have already taken place.

Use Common Sense

No one is perfect but if you use your best judgment and common sense when engaging on social media you won't go far wrong – remind employees that this is how they already operate day-to-day.

Respect The Offline Rule

Not everyone wants to have their photo shared all over social media. Give some thought to the conversations that you have offline with your colleagues or customers and give guidance around maintaining the privacy of those conversations. For example if you go to an event and you take a photo it is only polite to ask permission from the people in the photo if you can post it to social media.

Follow Us

Encourage your employees to follow your branded social channels. It is a great place for employees to start engaging in content that is “safe”. Employees will know that content from their employer is going to be branded and ready for sharing. They can start engaging with easy content that will help them ease into social networking.

We're Here To Help

Provide a point of contact. Employees may come across conversations that they won't be able to participate in e.g. a journalist has contacted them. In such cases make it easy for your employees to contact someone internally so they can step out of the discussion.

Monitoring Feeds

Be sure that you tell your employees that any activity they participate in on social media may appear in the brand's social monitoring feeds (assuming you have them!) and that it is likely that their participation may feature in the monitoring feed.

Social Etiquette

Many organisations will have a code of conduct already in place. When employees sign the contract to join the company, a code of conduct is often used to inform them as to how the company expects them to behave. Remind employees that the code of conduct is also relevant to online activity.

Take Care

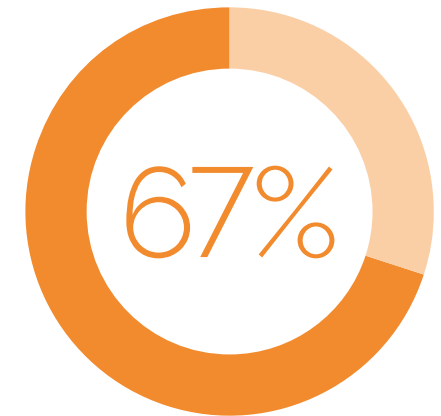
Remind employees to think about what they post before they post it. Help them realise that they not only need to take care of the potential risk to themselves but also the risk to the brand. Stop, pause and think before posting.

Remember The Day Job

It's easy to get swallowed up in social networking so just remind employees that it's there to assist their role.

Enjoy It

Employees that activate their professional brand online will open up new opportunities e.g. speaking opportunities, new customers, learning from others. It's a great way to connect and build their own network... for them!



67% of employees say they regularly check social media while at work

[Source Bambu]

HOW TO ENSURE YOUR EMPLOYEES UNDERSTAND THE POLICY

The first thing to do is remember that social media infiltrates every element of our daily life – and so should your policy. Make it easily available on and offline. If it's a new approach, you could consider a launch event to make sure everyone knows about it.

Don't stop there though; add it to your onboarding processes, stick a copy up in the café, do a desk drop. Just make sure that your hard work and careful consideration isn't wasted and give people ample chance to see it, read it and understand it.

The more legislative elements of the policy – especially as GDPR comes in to play – might mean you want employees to sign

something to confirm they've read and understood the policy. Don't forget the 'understood' part of this. Consider some FAQs on the intranet or an internal online discussion forum to give examples of best practice.

You could run a quiz to test people's knowledge of the policy. Taking a more lighthearted approach to what is essentially a serious and necessary governance matter is a good way to help ensure your corporate social media policy is well embedded within your business.

Consider creating scenario-based examples to illustrate good and bad practice. These can be incorporated into your internal news channels, or added to your onboarding processes and staff handbook.



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY EXAMPLES

For more inspiration,
check these out:



Ford: A bit dated but a great
example of how to get your
guidelines to fit on one page



IBM: Lengthy and wordy
but probably the most
comprehensive you'll find



GAP: Straight talking with
humour – EVERYONE
will understand



Intel: Some nice wording which
creates memorable points
to note



Coca-Cola: This is quite formal
but easy to read and not too long

HOW TO MONITOR EMPLOYER BRAND RISK ON SOCIAL MEDIA

There are many social media
monitoring tools out there but
perhaps not as many social
media listening tools. Listening
is about finding out who else is
posting content or commenting
on your brand, not just
monitoring the performance
and ripples created by your
own content.



It's early days for social listening
but media monitoring agencies,
such as mention.com, are
starting to offer the service plus
there are some other interesting
platforms out there, which could
be worth a look. Of these,
brandwatch.com seems to have
the most developed offering.

You could obviously take a more
home-grown approach and try
using Google Alerts but this is
likely to be more time consuming
as you will need to do your own
analysis of the results.

SOCIAL MEDIA RISK AND REPUTATION FAQs

Due to the emerging nature of social media use, many aspects of what is and isn't allowed are still open to interpretation. As with anything that comes close to an individual's privacy, caution on the part of the employer is the key to ensuring everyone is fairly treated.

Who owns an employee's social media account?

This comes down to the purpose of the account in question. If it's a personal account, set up for their own use by an employee, they have ownership. If there is a corporate social media account, group or page, whether it has been set up for multiple users or one single 'caretaker user' then this is owned by the employer. In the latter scenario, there are likely to be constraints on usage.

For example, the account can only be used for work-related posts or opinions, or posts may be subject to an approval process before publishing.

Can employers monitor employees on social media?

Anything in the public domain can obviously be seen by an employer and therefore monitored. But, as with most social media related scenarios, the answers are not black and white.

If an employee is using social media during work time, or accessing it from a corporate device or computer, then potentially the employer can monitor activity, but only within certain circumstances. In the UK, Citizen's Advice has a very clear explanation of what is and isn't allowed.



Can an employee be fired for using social media at work?

The answer to this question depends on what the employee was doing on social media and whether there can be proved to be a direct link with either a negative impact on their work or an outcome that is, in some way, detrimental to the business.

A good starting point is to have a clear social media policy that clearly articulates the boundaries of what is and isn't allowed. This then gives everyone involved a clear idea of what constitutes appropriate use of social media, both in and outside of the workplace.

The ACAS website has some useful information related to social media disciplinary and grievance situations.

Is it illegal for an employee to criticise their employer on social media?

This one's a bit like asking 'how long is a piece of string'. Ultimately, it probably depends on what is being said, how, where, why and whether there are any particular circumstances that need considering (for example if there is an ongoing court case or legal situation).

This article, from Personnel Today, gives some insight into factors that come in to play but there's no real one-size-fits-all when it comes to free speech.





Tribal Impact specialises in social media advocacy. We work with B2B organisations that are frustrated because they can no longer cut through the digital noise to reach their audience. We do this by helping them join the dots between Social Selling, Social Media Marketing and Employee Advocacy.

Learn more at www.tribalimpact.com



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