

Guidance on writing your company's Social Media Policy

Introduction

With the increasing use of social media in both our business and personal lives, it is more important than ever for companies to protect their reputations. There are several issues of importance to any company when it comes to social media use, including – but not limited to - productivity, privacy, and a host of legal matters. Therefore, organisations of all sizes, across all sectors, should seriously consider developing a formal social media policy. This guide will cover the things you should consider when writing a social media policy for your business.

What is social media?

Social media is a collection of online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.

Social media is an ever-changing way to communicate with customers and the industry. In business, social media is used to market products, promote brands, and connect to current customers and foster new business relationships.

When writing a social media policy, it is important to clearly state that the policy applies to multi-media, social networking websites, blogs and wikis, for both professional and personal use.

Keep in mind that social media is changing rapidly and it is therefore important that you regularly review the policy to include any relevant changes.

Official company profiles

The overall goal of social media is to engage with followers, develop better relationships and communication channels, and use real time feedback to respond to key issues faced by your audience. Before you start posting on social media, you first should lay the groundwork:

- **How is social media activity managed?**
Establish the software you are going to be using to manage any company social media activity.
- **Who can post to official company profiles?**
Establish who will be responsible for giving access and what access levels will be available to staff members. Consider any social media training that needs to be given to those using your software of choice.
- **Is there an official approval process for social media posts?**
Should social media follow the same approval guidelines as other forms of publication?
What are they?
- **Branding**
Do you have branding, tone of voice and ways you talk about a specific product? Include it in your social media policy.
- **Responsibility for content**

Will each staff member be responsible for the content they publish in blogs, wikis or any other form of user-generated media? Who can they turn to when unsure if content is appropriate for sharing? Employees should know to exercise good judgment and be prepared to deal with any consequences that result from inappropriate actions or statements online.

- **Engagement procedure**

You should set guidelines on managing issues and crisis e.g. correct any mistakes immediately, be clear about what you've done to fix it. Inform appropriate staff members.

Use of social media in the workplace

- **Social media access on company devices**

State whether employees are allowed to access social media via the organisation's computers, laptops or company owned mobile devices. State whether the access is permitted at all times or within a certain time limit and make clear if any social media access is blocked on the organisation's computers, laptops or other company owned mobile devices.

- **Social media access on own devices**

Employees may wish to access social media via their own computers, laptops or other mobile devices while at work. State whether employees are required to limit use of social media on their own devices to break times, between jobs/appointments or during work travel time.

- **Excessive use of social media**

Productivity is essential – social media efforts can only be successful if employees find a proper balance between social media and other work. Employees should not be using social media for excessive amounts of time or to an extent where it impacts on the ability to complete work duties. Some businesses reserve the right to monitor social media usage of employees e.g. when the employee has spent an excessive amount of time on social media in the workplace.

Using personal profiles in a professional capacity

Using social media to develop your professional presence online through personal social media is now common place. In order to ensure that these don't have a negative impact on the business, personal use rules should be set.

- **Maintain the confidentiality of business.**

Employees should be prohibited from sharing confidential and proprietary information online. Externally disclosing, posting or sharing business-related confidential information that belongs to your company such as customer lists, internal information, financial data, systems and technology information, operations and other information related to your business (specify) should be prohibited.

- **Accountability**
Authenticity is key – users of social media should clearly identify themselves by name, and when relevant, position and company but they should clearly brand their online posts as personal and purely their own. The disclaimer should be something like “the views expressed are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of (your company name)”.
- **Copyright and other laws.**
Internet postings should respect copyright, privacy, intellectual property, fair use, financial disclosure and other applicable laws.
- **Bullying, harassment, discrimination and sharing inappropriate links.**
Employees should be careful discussing things where emotions run high (e.g. politics and religion) and show respect to others’ opinions. Inflammatory subjects should be avoided. Dishonourable content such as racial, ethnic, sexual, religious and physical slurs should not be tolerated.
- **Personal/professional crossover**
Whilst it is a good thing to show a certain amount of personality in your profile, photos from a night out at the weekend, for example, would not be appropriate. If in doubt, it can often be best to keep professionally focused profiles completely separate from more personal profiles. However, employees should be aware that their posts aren’t anonymous and anything they post on their personal profiles could still impact on the reputation of the company they work for.

Personal account guidelines

It's perfectly acceptable to develop separate accounts for personal and professional uses. Many professionals open two accounts within the same social media site, one for each purpose. However, employees should be aware that just because their colleagues are connected to them via a professional account only, there is still a chance they could find and view their personal account. If employees decide to keep a personal social media account, the following guidelines should be considered:

- **Privacy settings**
As a rule, employees should avoid posting anything on social media, personally or professionally, that would be inappropriate for bosses, co-workers or the company’s clients to see. They should consider privacy settings to control the level of information the people they are not connected with can see.
- **Keeping personal social media use in check**
Employees should be mindful of how much time they spend on social media. Personal social media should not be used in excess during work hours.
- **Bullying, harassment, discrimination and sharing inappropriate links.**
The internet doesn’t forget. Dishonourable content should not be posted, as – although it may come from a personal profile – this could potentially undermine the company. According to research, by 2022, employers will routinely monitor workers’ Facebook and Twitter postings. Employees should refrain from posting anything controversial or/and anything that could negatively impact the business, even if the posts come from a personal account.

Leaving

When an employee leaves the company, access to company's social media accounts should be removed. Consider refreshing social account passwords regularly to maintain account security.

Disciplinary action over social media use

It is important to be transparent to staff about acceptable social media use and the time spent on social media. Employees should be aware that use of social media in a way that may be deemed as deliberate or inadvertent misuse, which could be a breach of policy (this includes – but is not limited to - libel, or written defamation, and slander), may lead to disciplinary action. This should apply to activity on employees' own social media as well as official company channels.

Points to note:

- A company may be held responsible for something an employee has written or said, whether or not it is on a company-sanctioned space, including a blog or website.
- Action can also be taken against you for repeating libellous information from another source, so you must check carefully before quoting statements from blogs or websites. This can also apply to linking to defamatory information.
- You should consider whether a statement can be proved before writing or using it (in print or online) – in English law, the onus is on the person making the statement to establish its truth.
- A company that provides a forum for blogging can be liable for defamatory statements they host.

Examples of social media policies:

- **Adidas Group** <http://ow.ly/eiOi30d14U4>
- **Intel** <http://ow.ly/WFI430d168F>
- **Coca-Cola** <http://ow.ly/5H8e30d16iB>

Disclaimer:

This document has been produced for guidance only. The advice given by AHDB verbally or in correspondence on writing a social media policy and any implementation of such advice, is subject to professional judgment. Whilst every reasonable care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of such advice provided, neither AHDB nor the person giving the advice can accept any responsibility for any action taken, or not taken, on the basis of this advice.

AHDB shall not be liable to any person for any loss or damage which may arise from using any such advice.

