

Social Media: Risk or Reward – What Can HR Do?

Social Media can be a double edge sword for a company. According to a survey conducted in 2009 by Russell Herder and Ethos Business Law, 81% of the respondents view social media as a corporate security risk. However, if a company chooses not to participate in social media, they run the risk of being perceived as *being behind the curve*. In order to prevent the security risk and the perceptions, it is up to HR to take the lead and determine how to effectively manage social media in the company.

Companies have many issues to be concerned about with social media participation, which often leads to cutting off access to social media. Robert Half Technology conducted a study that found 54% of U.S. companies *prohibit use* of social media on company time for many or all employees. While employees may not understand what the risks are, there are many, including the disclosure of confidential information such as:

- ★ Finances
- ★ Strategies and goals
- ★ Brand and trade secrets
- ★ Proprietary research
- ★ Unreleased advertising
- ★ Personal information (i.e. employees or clients)
- ★ Internal processes

Employees may not even realize the information they are sharing is confidential or that they are releasing it to the public when they post it. Plus, even if you delete the information, once something is posted, it cannot be removed from the Internet. Employees also can (even accidentally) cause legal implications through copyright infringements / plagiarism and defamation statements. Whether it is on company time or personal time, if the employee is viewed as representing the company, the company can be liable.

For all these reasons, it is important for a company to develop a social media policy. But what should you address in your policy? The list can get pretty long, which means so can your policy. Some issues you may want to cover include:

- ★ Which sites or tools can or cannot be used at work
- ★ Who can use them
- ★ What purposes can they be used for
- ★ When they can be used (i.e. are there any restrictions such as during lunch or breaks)
- ★ The type of information that is acceptable or unacceptable to be discussed
- ★ A statement prohibiting the use of social media for harassment or discrimination
- ★ How the company will monitor or search an employee's activity
- ★ What the consequences are for breaking the policy
- ★ A statement for employees to sign showing employee Acknowledgement & Understanding

It will be important to update your policy at a minimum annually; however, with technology rapidly changing, you may want to revisit your policy more frequently. In addition, you may want to consider having employees re-acknowledge their understanding of the policy every 60 – 90 days.

We've also found that many employees may acknowledge and agree that they understand the policy, but they actually may not truly understand what they can and cannot do and the ramifications their activity can have on the company, even during non-business hours. To address some of these misunderstandings, it will be important for your management of social media to include training. The training should cover:

- ★ An overview of company policy on usage
- ★ Why the policy is needed
- ★ An overview of all the social media sites
- ★ The impact of “personal usage” and what that entails
- ★ Emphasize what is allowed
- ★ Define who is authorized to speak on the company's behalf
- ★ Encourage common sense
- ★ Explain how the company will monitor employee usage
- ★ Explain consequences for violations
- ★ Urge use of disclaimers when posting on social media

Depending on your workplace, you may even find you need to vary your training by user. Do you have a large group of Millennials and Gen Ys that are regular users of social media? Their training and examples may be very different than let's say those of the Baby Boomer and Radio Baby Generation. Or perhaps you have a Manufacturing environment – office workers may need one type of training because they are on the computer daily versus those that work on the shop floor. Or, how about individuals that need to use social media as a daily part of their job versus those that don't – for example marketing or HR staff. All of these issues need to be taken into consideration when developing a training and communications program.

Your organization needs to realize the impact that social media can have. While there may be security and legal risks, there are some definite positives to using and allowing social media in the workplace. A study by the University of Melbourne found that *productivity increased by 9%* among people who used the Internet for personal purposes at work. What company would turn down an increase in productivity? The key is managing social media to fit your culture rather than letting it manage you!

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