

Sample social networking policy

By Rick Vanover

Introduction

Organizations may not know exactly how to manage social networking sites from a policy perspective. While organizations cannot control what its associates do on these sites, authoritative policies can be drafted to establish protocol for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors as it relates to the workplace. In this TechRepublic download, IT pro Rick Vanover has drafted a sample policy for you to customize and establish the level of authority desired to protect your organization's interests.

Social Networking Policy

Authority

This social networking policy applies to all associates, contractors, business partners or other parties with a material interest in [Acme, Inc.] (collectively referred to as the *associates*). This policy is approved by Human Resources and the executive steering committee.

State of social media

Social media, professional networking sites, rapid-fire communications, blog sites, and personal Web sites are all useful technologies; [Acme, Inc.] realizes this fact. Every associate has an opportunity to express and communicate online in many ways, and [Acme, Inc.] encourages an online presence. Above all else, everyone needs to use good judgment on what material makes its way online.

This policy will set forth guidelines that employees should follow for all online communications in reference to [Acme, Inc.].

Relevant technologies

This policy includes (but is not limited to) the following specific technologies:

- Personal blogs
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Facebook
- MySpace
- Personal Web sites
- Digg

Responsibility

Any material presented online in reference to [Acme, Inc.] by any associate is the responsibility of the poster. We encourage all communication to be made in an identifying manner, to establish credibility above all else. Along with clear identification, associates must state that any opinion is yours individually and not a form of official communication from [Acme, Inc.].

Topic matter guidelines

[Acme, Inc.] associates are encouraged to use the following guidelines in social networking practices:

- Be relevant to your area of expertise.
- Do not be anonymous.
- Maintain professionalism, honesty, and respect.
- Apply a "good judgment" test for every activity related to [Acme, Inc.]: Could you be guilty of leaking information, trade secrets, customer data, or upcoming announcements? Is it negative commentary regarding [Acme, Inc.]?

Activity showing good judgment would include statements of fact about [Acme, Inc.] and its products and services, facts about already-public information, or information on the [Acme, Inc.] Web site.

Further, if any associate becomes aware of social networking activity that would be deemed distasteful or fail the good judgment test, please contact the anonymous social media response center at: socialresponse@acmeinc.com.

Company assets

The use of company assets (computers, Internet access, email, etc.) is intended for purposes relevant to the responsibilities assigned to each associate. Social networking sites are not deemed a requirement for most positions, and certain job titles are not permitted to access these services over the Internet. For associates that are allowed to access these services, a reasonable and limited amount of use of company assets are permitted for social networking services.

Inaccurate or defamatory content

Associates who participate in online communication deemed not to be in the best interest of [Acme Inc.] will be subject to disciplinary action. This online communication can include but is not limited to:

- Company information or data leakage.
- Inaccurate, distasteful, or defamatory commentary about the company.

Disciplinary action can include termination or other intervention deemed appropriate by Human Resources.

Off-Limits material

This policy sets forth the following items which are deemed off-limits for social networking:

Intellectual property, trade secrets, or customer data

[Acme Inc.]'s intellectual property, trade secrets, and customer data are strictly forbidden from any online discourse except through mechanisms managed internally by [Acme, Inc.] communications or marketing groups.

Online recommendations

Some sites, such as LinkedIn, allow members to "recommend" current or former co-workers. [Acme, Inc.] forbids associates to participate in employee recommendations for reasons of company liability. All communication of this type should be referred to Human Resources for verification.

Financial information

Any online communication regarding the company's financial data is strictly forbidden except through mechanisms managed internally by [Acme, Inc.] communications or marketing groups.

Company-sensitive matters

Any online communication regarding proprietary information such as layoffs, strategic decisions, or other announcements deemed inappropriate for uncoordinated public exchange is forbidden.