

Why have a Social Media Policy?

Today it is clear that competitive companies use social media. Due to its omnipresence, it cannot be ignored. Employees will be using it to obtain and share information. Marketers and salespeople will be using it to inform customers of your products and services. A social media policy should be regarded as an important tool just like employee handbooks, nondisclosure agreements, and the like by a modern company dealing with the economic and legal realities of today's fast-moving connected world.

Thinking about Your Social Media Policy: The What, Who, Where, How and When

What is your Goal? - Whenever you have a policy you are trying to achieve something. What is your goal by having a policy? Knowing what you are trying to get at will largely define how the policy is written. For most companies their goal will be a mix of "can do" incentives to foster openness, creativity, and sharing where appropriate with some distinct "thou shall not" provisions to protect against harms.

Legal Tip: Don't be overbroad. Be aware there are certain restriction you cannot put into your policy, such as preventing workers commenting on their workplace on their personal social media accounts.

Who is your Audience? - Social media is pervasive: your employees are using it on their downtime and your customers are using it to discuss your products and services. While your policy deals with social media on the whole you should make distinctions based on whether you are dealing with an internal audience (employees) or an external audience (customers, competitors, and other commentators).

Where do you Put Your Policy? - Placement is key. If you bury your external policy on your website how will people know what it is and if you plan on rolling out a social media marketing plan, but you tell employees about social media use in a one-page afterthought in their handbook why will they care to follow it? You don't want to hide it. You want to share it so that everyone is on the same page whether they are your customers or employees.

How does your Policy Read? - Your policy should be authentic, accountable, respect intellectual property and individual rights, and should be easy to read. If your own employees cannot make heads or tails of what you are getting at how will customers react when all they want to do is give you feedback and you have written a manifesto? **Legal Tip: Keep it simple. If your policy is used as evidence and you cannot explain it to a layperson your policy will be more of hindrance than help.**

When Should You Think About Your Social Media Policy? - Yesterday. You have already thought about how to treat your employees and how to sell your goods and services to customers. Don't you think you should have thought about how you communicate and interact with them already? **Legal Tip: Update your social media periodically. Laws affecting social media quickly change and like HR compliance the need to update your policy is constant.**

Contact me and we can draft and review a social media policy to work for your business!