

Blogging and participation in other social media has become one of the most popular means of communicating on the Internet. Recognizing this phenomenon, ___ has implemented a social media policy that addresses the type of information employees are permitted to share on their personal blogs, on others' blogs, and in other online social media interactions.

What is Social Media?

Social media are primarily Internet- and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information. The term most often refers to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few. Examples of social media applications are Google Groups, MySpace, Facebook, Youmeo, Last.fm, YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter.

What is Blogging?

A "blog" refers to an Internet online personal journal established and frequently updated by an individual. According to the blog tracking service Technorati, there were 112 million blogs in January 2008, with 120 thousand new ones appearing each day. Blogs are generally accessible to anyone with Internet access. A blog is fully searchable through Google or any other search engine, and other blogs can link to it, thereby carrying the blogger's message to millions of viewers. The nature of blogging encourages a free-wheeling discussion of topics, the direction of which is often beyond a blogger's control. The millions of potential viewers of blogs may include an organization's existing and potential customers, existing and potential investors, law enforcement personnel and employees.

Why Do We Need a Policy?

Many organizations have adopted policies that regulate and restrict employees' use of blogging and other social media, in the same way that they restrict use of the organization's communications systems and business equipment, including computers, Internet access, instant messaging and email. Social media can have a tremendous impact on a company's public and internal profile. Statements made in such unwieldy public forums can have serious legal, public relations and, ultimately, financial consequences – both for employees who participate in social media and for the organization.

Organizations must be especially concerned about the impact of employee participation in social media. Information appearing in employee blogs or other social media sites concerning business may improperly disclose insider information. Information about the organization that is inaccurate may also run afoul of securities regulations.

Basic Rules

In general, _____ discourages all discussion of company business in employee blogs and other social media outlets. This policy is similar to our policy prohibiting employee communication with journalists. We require that any communications with the media be made by an authorized company spokesperson. We feel that restricting comments about the company in a blog or other social media outlets is an appropriate extension of this policy.

General principles to follow:

- Make it clear that the views expressed in the blog are yours alone and do not necessarily represent the views of your employer.
- Do not identify yourself as an _____ employee.
- Always respect the organization's confidentiality and proprietary information.
- Ask your manager if you have any questions about what is appropriate to include in your blog. Be respectful to the company, employees, customers, partners, and competitors.
- Understand when the organization asks that topics not be discussed for confidentiality or legal compliance reasons.
- Ensure that your blogging activity does not interfere with your work commitments.

Prohibited Conduct

To protect its vital interests, _____ requires that employees not engage in certain conduct with respect to their personal blogs and other social media. The following violations will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action:

- Disclosing organization secrets
- Engaging in harmful conduct, such as workplace gossip, posting racially or sexually offensive language or graphics and disparaging co-employees, vendors and customers
- Writing about a client without their permission (including posting of client photos)
- Disseminating third-party intellectual property without prior authorization
- Disclosure of other companies' secrets