

## Should You Police Employee Social Media Use?

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August 8, 2012 At any given moment your work force is probably liking, tweeting, linking pinning. Is it necessary to develop guidelines that spell out the do's and don'ts of social media usage by employees?

[Charles Krugel](#), a human resources attorney, says the online world has blurred social and interpersonal boundaries and that's why it is important to have clear social media guidelines in place.

According to Krugel, businesses often wait to create a set of rules until after a problem has surfaced. He says the most common scenario is an employee criticizing something about the

company online and the company reacts by disciplining the employee.

Having a policy in place doesn't guarantee there won't be an issue, however. Krugel cites the example of a car dealership in the Chicago area that had a sales promotion offering food and drink. One of the employees used a social media platform to criticize the offerings and the way that employees were treated. The dealership reacted by firing the employee and the former employee got the National Labor Relations Board involved in settling the dispute and rewriting the company's social media guidelines.

"Employers don't want employees or customers trashing their business' reputation or exposing confidential information to the public," Krugel says. "Many employees seem to believe that anything is open for display or discussion."

Social media guidelines simply insist that employees posting about their business keep the conversation honest and civil.

"One of the key issues a business needs to address is if employees and clients are using these forums for venting or voicing issues," Krugel says. "How do we encourage civility and sincerity as opposed to vindictiveness and open hostility?"

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### Crafting A Social Media Policy

Krugel has these suggestions for implementing a social media usage policy for employees.

- Determine how important social media is to the business. Is it a large part of the day-to-day operation or a minor part?
- Create a response or intervention plan in case a crisis occurs.
- Decide who will manage and monitor social media use and content.
- Establish which topics are off-limits or taboo. Don't assume it's understood that the recipe for the secret sauce is a secret.
- Make the guidelines consistent for all employees.

Krugel says it is important to stay current on trends and technology online to keep a company's social media presence relevant. That means familiarity with everything from the latest slang to security issues. It might also be worthwhile to address copyright and fair use issues with employees, especially regarding the use of photographs online.

While creating the regulations may seem to be a daunting task, the website [socialmediagovernance.com](#) has collected the social media guidelines of more than 200 companies into one database. While your company may not be the size of [Cisco](#), it might be beneficial to read through the policies of big corporations who have looked at this issue already and responded with employee guidelines.

The wording and intent of workplace social-media usage guidelines is still being debated. The [NLRB](#) has examined the policies of several large companies and has highlighted sections it believes are unlawful. Krugel says there simply isn't one set of legal guidelines governing the wording and intent of social media policies.

**Making It Work**

A social-media usage policy can be a tool for helping preserve a company's reputation while allowing employees to reach out through their own networks to build business.

Whether it's a long document or a short one, a copied and bound volume that is distributed or an online document that is shared, the social media policy should make it clear what employees can say about the company and how they are expected to behave online.

And don't expect to write just one set of guidelines that will last forever. The rules could change in the time it takes to type a status update.

*Carla Turchetti is a veteran print and broadcast journalist who likes to break a topic down and keep her copy tight. That's why this bio is so brief! Carla blogs via [Contently.com](#).*

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