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Why Your Business Needs a Social Media Policy

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The Pew Research Centre began tracking social media usage in 2005. In that year, 7% of adults were regularly using social media. A decade later, 65% of adults are active social media users. While social media use is more heavily weighted to a younger demographic (90% of those aged 18 to 29) a full 77% of 30 to 49-year olds are also frequent social media users. There is no denying it – your employees are using social media and using it in every facet of their lives. Which begs the question – how does this impact on your business?

Social media has been referred to as “word of mouth on steroids”. It makes good news travel fast, and, it seems, bad news travel even faster. The business of managing a brand’s reputation has become more and more complex, with every member of your organization a potential brand spokesperson. How should business owners and their HR people ensure that their employees are positive ambassadors in the digital world?

The answer starts, at least, with your social media policy. Unlike other HR policies, which can rely heavily on the consequences of non-compliance in the form of punitive action, policies on social media need to come at the issue from a different angle. A message or post that reflects negatively on a company cannot be erased by the sender of it being disciplined or even fired; a bell can’t be “unrung” and its message can echo out in the world for a very long time. On

the flip side, employees who share messages that present the business in a good light, whether to customers, prospects or future staff members, help drive engagement and success for the business.

A social media policy must focus on educating employees to be good digital citizens, and in doing so build their own professional reputation while positively impacting the business. It must be emphasized that even when

someone is using his or her own personal digital identity, it is very easy to connect an individual with his or her employer. There is really no such thing as a division between “personal” and “business” social media use.

Policies should include the social media objectives of the business and the potential benefits to the individual staff member for investing in a positive social media identity. Staff should understand the nature of the information they should (and should not) be sharing, and when disclaimers are a good idea based on the content shared. Specific guidance should be provided as to how social media users should deal with negative reactions (internet “trolling” included) that they might encounter.

Investing in a strong social media policy that includes education will go a long way in ensuring that the power of social media is harnessed in a positive way for your business.

This article has been prepared for the general information of our clients. Specific professional advice should be obtained prior to the implementation of any suggestion contained in this article. Please note that this publication should not be considered a substitute for personalized tax advice related to your particular situation.

Connect with the Author

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