

HOW TO

Manage Social Media at work

Tips and Guides for Managers

Social media helps people keep in touch and enables them to interact. It allows Companies, groups and individuals to share information, ideas and views. In a business environment social media can affect communications among managers, employees and job applicants; how organisations promote and control their reputation; and how colleagues treat one another.

It can also distort what boundaries there are between home and work. For example, is an employee using a blog to express personal views or are they acting as a representative of the Company? If an employee has a twitter account are they posting tweets on behalf of the Company or are their tweets their own views?

Some estimates report that misuse of the internet and social media by workers costs Britain's economy billions of pounds every year and add that many employers are already facing issues like time theft, defamation, cyber bullying, freedom of speech and the invasion of privacy.

Develop a Policy

Employers should develop a clear policy setting out what is and what is not acceptable behaviour at work when using the internet, emails, smart phones, and networking websites. The policy should:

- Give clear guidelines for employees on what they can and cannot say about the organisation;
- Give clear examples of what will be regarded as gross misconduct - for example, posting derogatory or offensive comments on the internet about the company or a work colleague;
- Make it clear when employees will be seen as representing the Company and what personal views they can express - for example, some employees are forbidden from expressing any political views;
- Be clear about the distinction between business and private use of social media;
- Cover whether private social media use can be accessed on Company Equipment;
- If it allows limited private use in the workplace, it should be clear what this means in practice;
- Be clear about what it means by defamation and how it expects employees to help protect the Company or organisational brand.

A policy should also make employees and employers aware that their online behaviour could break defamation, data protection or privacy laws. For example, if an employee posted damaging or libellous comments about a Company or its products or publishes sensitive commercial data; or if an employer divulged protected personal data, such as giving away details of salary, political or religious beliefs or disciplinary records.

The policy should aim to ensure: employees do not feel gagged; staff and managers feel protected against online bullying; and the organisation feels confident its reputation will be guarded.

Personal Use vs A Representative of the Company

There can be confusion over what is acceptable behaviour regarding the use of social media.

Employees may believe they should be able to say what they want on their own social media sites, especially if these comments are made outside of work. However, often employees don't realise the implications of making derogatory remarks about people they work with or their employer.

Employees sometimes use social networking sites, emails or other forms of social media to air their grievances. These comments could be seen by customers or colleagues.

Employers should avoid knee-jerk reactions and avoid responding in the heat of the moment. Instead they should stick with the proper disciplinary procedure. Don't forget direct forms of communication, many of the causes of conflict at work can be resolved by face-to-face interaction.

Use of Social Media for Work Purposes

If an employee is representing the Company online, set appropriate rules for what information they may disclose and the range of opinions they may express. Bring to their attention relevant legislation on copyright and public interest disclosure.

Some rules should be included on the use of social media in recruitment, which managers and employees should follow. When recruiting, employers should be careful if assessing applicants by looking at their social networking pages - this can be discriminatory and unfair.

Disciplinary Procedures

Employers should try to apply the same standards of conduct in online matters as it would in offline issues.

To help Companies respond reasonably, employers should consider the nature of the comments made and their likely impact on the organisation. It would help if the employer gives examples of what might be classed as 'defamation' and the penalties it would impose. The employer should also be clear in outlining what is regarded as confidential in the organisation.

How can we help? ...

- We provide advice and support
- We can develop your Social Media Policy