



Trying to develop a social media policy for your organisation? Struggling to understand where to begin and what to include? Look no further! We are here to help and here is how to create a social media policy. Grab a cup of tea...it's a long read!

### **Key Points**

- **Work out a policy:** An employer should set out in writing what it regards as acceptable behaviour, in the use of social media at work and what is not acceptable. It should also give clear guidelines for employees on what they can and cannot say about the organisation.
- **Draw a line between private and work lives:** An employer should be clear throughout its policy in making a distinction between business and private use of social media. If it allows limited private use in the workplace, or in any way connected with the organisation, it should be clear what this actually means in practice.
- **Advantages:** The benefits of a social media policy can include helping an employer to protect itself against liability for the actions of its workers and line managers to manage performance effectively.
- **Be ready to adapt:** A policy can have many benefits, but an employer should make sure it is written in a way that can accommodate alterations, so it keeps pace with the continuing evolution of social media.

### **What should the social media policy cover?**

- **Network security:** To avoid viruses and malware, most organisations will have controls on the downloading of software. Technical security features, such as firewalls, will usually be managed by the IT department or Managed Service Provider.
- **Acceptable behaviour** and use of -
  - Internet and emails:** If personal use is allowed, state what is allowed.
  - Smart phones and hand-held devices:** Employers need to regularly review and update their policies to cover the new and evolving ways for accessing social media.
  - Social networking sites:** Employees should regularly check the privacy settings on their social networking profiles, as they can change.

## **Social media and data protection**

- **An employer** should cross-reference its social media policy to its bullying and harassment policy.
- **Blogging and tweeting:** 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.
- **Business objectives:** As well as setting clear rules on behaviour, many employers are integrating the use of social media tools into their business strategy. Social networking can be used internally to encourage employee engagement with the organisation, and externally to help promote the organisation's brand and reputation.
- **Disciplinary procedures:** An employer should try to apply the same standards of conduct in online matters, as it would in offline issues.
- **To help an organisation respond reasonably,** the employer 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. Further, the employer should be clear in outlining what is regarded as confidential in the organisation.

## **How to communicate your social media policy**

- **Consult:** An employer should talk with their employees in determining what will be in the policy. This will help ensure it is fair and it will also help make it relevant to the organisation's needs. For example, if your employees handle sensitive and confidential information on members of the public, the policy will need to reflect this.
- **Use of social media:** A high proportion of employees do not know if their employer has a policy on internet use. Technology is evolving so quickly that many policies soon become out of date, so they need to be reviewed regularly. Social media channels can be an effective way for an employer to raise awareness of its policy and any changes.
- **New staff:** An employer's induction programme is a good way to make clear to new starters the boundaries for use of the internet. Each organisation will have its own culture and standards of 'acceptable behaviour', but it is best to be clear about these from the beginning.

## **Legal considerations**

- **The Human Rights Act 1998** gives a '*right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence*'.
- **The Data Protection Act 1988** covers how information about employees and job applicants can be collected, handled and used.

Please feel free to call our helpful and knowledgeable team on 01843 572600 if you would like any advice about your social media. You can also email us at [hello@365itsupport.co.uk](mailto:hello@365itsupport.co.uk) – we are always happy to help and provide advice for your IT requirements, including your social media and policies.