

Ask SCORE

TIPS FOR CREATING A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR YOUR SMALL BUSINESS

Social media in the workplace is a huge gray area for employers. Putting guardrails around social media use has been a growing challenge as these platforms have become a central part of our lives – and our work.

Social media use in the workplace was once simply a concern over time management. Could you trust your employees to get work done with the distraction of Facebook notifications popping up on their phones throughout the day? Today, there's another layer of complexity as more and more professionals use and rely on social media to do their jobs. Even more, many businesses now rely on their employee's social media content to promote the company and drive customer awareness.

If you haven't already, consider creating a social media policy for your small business. A written policy will help you clarify the gray area into a more black and white set of social media usage expectations that support and protect not only

your business, but your employees as well.

Create a social media policy that clearly states the do's and don'ts of social media use related to your business.

There's a lot to consider when deciding what goes into your social media policy and how to find a balance between the legal rights of the employees, your rights as an employer and the general wellbeing of your entire team.

Consider these tips as you set out to create a social media policy for your business.

Tip #1: Recognize that Your Employees Have Rights

Protecting your company from the financial impacts of lost time and reputation damage by restricting social media usage and certain types of content can begin to infringe on your employee's right to freedom of speech and other rights. Do your homework to understand your employees' rights and your rights as an owner before you draw up your social policy.

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The National Labor Relations Board is a great resource for learning the details of the National Labor Relations Act (<https://www.nlrb.gov/guidance/key-reference-materials/national-labor-relations-act>) and its protection of an employee's freedom of speech.

Tip #2: Be Clear on Your Expectations About Social Use in the Workplace

You need to be upfront with your team about their use of social media during work hours. And, those stipulations need to be spelled out clearly in your policy. If you feel that it's in the best interest of the company to limit social media use to breaks or the lunch hour, then that goes in the policy as a line item. Be specific so there's no confusion.

Tip #3: Talk to Your Employees Before They Endorse Your Product on Social

There's a fine line between employees rallying behind your brand with positive social posts and coming across as endorsing or promoting a product to an unknowing audience. The Federal Trade Commission's Endorsement Guide (<https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/>

business-center/guidance/ftcs-endorsement-guides-what-people-are-asking) details specific rules to prevent paid company endorsements as a way to protect consumers. Employees who use their social accounts to promote your product without disclosing that they work for your business put themselves – and your company – at serious risk. Take your lead from the FTC's guidelines and make sure this is clearly spelled out in your social policy.

Tip #4: Create a Policy that Addresses Both General Employees and Social Media Managers

Your policy needs to account for the actions of employees tasked with managing your business' social media accounts. This can include posting and sharing content and commenting on your behalf. Create a separate policy for these members of your team, or create an addendum to your policy that details the guidelines for posting, including a social strategy and plan for the business. Whichever you choose, make sure your expectations are clearly documented and communicated.


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Tip #5: Discuss Your Social Media Policy Openly with All of Your Employees

Documentation is important, but openly communicating your expectations is the secret to the success of your social media policy. Discuss the policy with your employees and welcome their feedback.

Before you add your social media policy to your employee handbook, run it by a group of advisors.

Your social media policy, like any other business policy, has a legal impact on your business and should be run past your attorney before being implemented. It's also a good idea to consult a Human Resources professional to make sure you've thought through every aspect of how social media could impact your business.

Another smart source of guidance is your SCORE mentor. A SCORE mentor can support you as you draft your policy and connect you with a small business attorney and HR consultant who can help you put the best policy in place for your small business.

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