

Employee social media policy dos and don'ts

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Social Media has presented people with a fun and rewarding way to engage and share information. Social Media provides various opportunities to different people and companies. It is transforming the ways of business and impacting brands in the most unimaginable ways. Although Social Media is changing the world of marketing and branding, it begot challenges and risks that most organizations were unprepared for. A single tweet has the potential to either double sales volume or plummets the value of company stock on the money markets, depending on how it was fashioned. The need to avert such risks and closely guard the brand's reputation has prompted most companies to take a proactive approach in how their employees use social media.

Social media and other digital platforms provide brands with an opportunity to leverage their employees' expertise and turn them into brand advocates within offline and online spaces. This concept is solidly rooted in the universally recognized power of word of mouth in influencing consumer behaviour. To harness the power of word of mouth from employees, organizations are developing employee advocacy programs. These programs are meant to engender, manage and incentivize employee involvement in the promotion of a brand.

The following statistics by Sproutsocial demonstrate the power of tapping into employee advocacy:

1. 72% of salespeople who use social media as part of the sales process are more successful than those who do not.
2. The brand message is shared 24 times when shared by employees compared to when shared by the company.
3. Customers referred by an advocate have a whopping 37% higher retention rate.
4. 84% of customers value recommendations from friends and family above all forms of advertising, and 77% are more likely to buy when referred by an advocate.

The need to constructively utilize employee advocacy in promoting the organization and its products and services gave rise to the importance of an employee social media policy. An employee, social media policy sets out the guidelines, rules, and generally acceptable conduct that an organization's employees must adhere to in their use of social media. Failure to abide by the dictates of the social media policy can result in reprimand and dismissal. Social media policy development must be an all involving undertaking that ensures that all stakeholders are represented, and all views are factored in. Consensus building is of paramount importance during the process of developing a policy to ensure widespread employee buy-in. If employees feel excluded from the policymaking and stifled by the resulting document, they may abstain from the employee brand advocacy program, thereby denying the

organization a chance to benefit from their participation.

The absence of a social media policy gives the employees carte blanche, and they may end up acting in ways that do more harm than good, hence defeating the whole process of advocacy. Employees social media activities can affect:

1. Performance
2. Fellow employees
3. Business partners and stakeholders like suppliers, customers, etc
4. The overall organization.

Employee social media policy is meant to avoid the above pitfalls and guide employees on using social media. A good social media policy can accomplish the following:

1. Set expectations – This entails removing all the ambiguity from the process and ensure that all the participants know what is expected of them. Employees are informed beforehand, the parameters they are expected to operate from within, hence this minimizes the risk outlined above.
2. Protect brand reputation – Company brands are powerful assets yet very fragile at the same time. As alluded to before, a single tweet can sink and ruin the entire brand, as a result enacting a social media policy is a good way of insulating the brand from social media risk.
3. Increase employee advocacy – Out of the fear of crossing the line, some employees avoid promoting the brand or participating in online conversations and engagements that involve the brand. A policy clarifies how employees are supposed to act and can go a long way in allaying their fears and eliciting their cooperation.

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Dos

1. Clearly state the unwanted behaviour – many at times organizations assume that all employees are responsible and civilized members of the society with full knowledge of the generally acceptable behaviour and etiquettes. However, that is not the case, and a policy needs to prohibit unwanted conduct. For example, things like harassment, intimidation, and bullying reflect badly on the organization henceforth. The social media policy needs to shun such behaviour.

2. Disclosure of classified information – company employees are privy to closely guarded organizational secrets that, if disclosed, can damage the organization and weakens its

position. The policy must endeavour to avoid leaking such information by mistake or by intent due to

rogue employees. Proprietary information or sensitive financial secrets are not for public consumption, so the social media policy must exist to protect them. It must also clarify the penalties that an organization imposes on the leaking of sensitive information by employees.

3. Informing the employees that they will be monitored – Employees must not feel like the organization is spying on them. However, informing them that their online activities will be monitored is essential. Monitoring activities help the organization to stay on top of issues and quickly take corrective measures where necessary.

4. Establish boundaries – Finally, it is imperative to establish firm barriers if the social media policy is to be effective. Employees must know the areas they are allowed to engage in and the areas appropriate for the official accounts to engage. For example, in a major disaster involving the organization, it will be appropriate for the official spokesperson or senior executives to engage.

Don't

1. Ambiguity and vagueness – When preparing a social media policy, avoid being vague and ambiguous. It is vital to clarify all facts and spell out the expected behaviour. In addition, serious attention must be given to the process of making a policy.

2. Generalization and Assumption – It is essential to avoid generalizing issues and assuming that people know what is expected of them.

3. Interfering in the private space – The organization should not try to micromanage employee involvement online. Instead, it must respect their private space and give employees room to freely engage in the digital space.

Conclusion

In conclusion, an employee social media policy is not an instrument to muzzle free speech but rather a mitigating tool to avoid the misuse of social media by employees that may hurt the organization. For businesses to effectively tap into the power of employee advocacy, they need a policy that guides the whole process and ensures that risks are reduced. A good social media policy establishes firm boundaries and avoids vagueness in its dictates.

This article was written by Nicholas Mushayi a consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants, a management and human resources consultants company.

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