



6 Social Media Policy Tips

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2013

How to create social media guidelines for your small business

Matt Schur

For many small business owners, social media is a key marketing and customer communications tool. But in order to ensure the most robust and consistent social presence, it's important to enact a social media policy for your employees.

"Putting together a [social media policy] gives you the ability to make sure your message and brand is conveyed in the right way," says Rob Wilson, president of Employco USA, which provides employer management, contract staffing and HR outsourcing services.

To create the most effective social media policy, consider these six tips.

1. Look at other companies' social media policies. Major organizations such as **GM** and **Coca-Cola** have their social media policies available online. Check them out to get some ideas, and then tailor these to your own small business.

2. Define your brand. "You have to know what your brand personality is, and that should be articulated and documented [in your social media policy]," says Jennifer Barbee, CEO of the digital media consulting group Jennifer Barbee, Inc. In the digital age, personality goes beyond logo, colors and font. "Once you have that brand voice documented, then you can talk to your team about how they're a part of spreading that message as well."

3. Schedule social media workshops. A good way to reinforce your social media policy is to schedule social media workshops every quarter or so, Barbee says. The company's marketing manager should lead a discussion about what the company is trying to accomplish on social media and on what platforms. Then discuss ways in which employees can use platforms appropriately to create content that fits with the company image.

4. Encourage employees to use social media. Your social media policy shouldn't be a list of things for employees not to do. "You should encourage positive interaction," Barbee says. "Even give incentives for content creation. There are a lot of ways to make that a really happy experience for employees. For instance, everyone loves coffee. Giving Starbucks gift cards is a great way to reward team members who create or spread viral content."

5. Specify what bad social media posts look like. "It's key to put in writing what is not acceptable," Barbee says. "Some examples include inappropriate photos, complaints about clients or work, and negative or nasty responses to public comments."

6. Keep social media access open but monitored. In the smartphone era, blocking access to certain sites on company computers doesn't do much to deter social media use. Keep sites unblocked, Wilson says, but tell employees that you'll monitor usage. "If productivity drops, you have to look further," he says.

