

[Company Name] Social Media Guideline

Background

Social media has fundamentally changed the way people socialize. Individuals and companies gain great benefit through social media. This social media guideline was developed to help you maximize the benefit and to avoid a few potential mistakes.

Public, Private, Personal, Professional

Social media often has the effect of blurring two distinct lines. These are the lines between what is private and what is public and between what is personal and what is professional. This policy is aimed at helping you on this subject when you are engaged in social media on topics related to the company.

Durability

One of the most important things to be aware of is that everything you publish is likely to be available online and, in many cases, widely visible for a very long time. Keep this in mind when you write. This does not mean you should spend all day polishing your work to award-winning standards, but it should act a reminder to exercise good judgment when you feel you are near one of the two lines mentioned above.

The best rules to follow is to assume that all of your managers, coworkers, clients, competitors, friends and family members will read what you publish and that the material will be available online forever.

Responsibility

You and you alone are responsible for what you publish. Your published work may reflect positively or negatively on you, your company and upon others.

Code of Conduct

Re-read the company's code of conduct and be aware of its requirements. The company's code of conduct applies online as well as offline.

Your Personal Social Media Profiles

Many people have personal social media profiles on sites like LinkedIn, Facebook and other social media sites. On these sites you may have many friends, associates and "friends of friends" linked to you. In many cases you may have not given much thought to accepting others into your network. But your personal network is linked to you and reflects on you and your interests. People will view your online profiles and will also link to other profiles that are linked to your profiles. If members of your network have content in their profiles that you would not be proud to have related to you, you should consider removing these individuals from your network.

Personal Disclosure and Attribution

When publishing material related to the company or the company's industry make sure to fully disclose your employment with the company and your role and to remind readers that the post is by you and you alone. Consider using a statement like this one: "I am an employee of [Company Name] This post is made by me and may not reflect the position or opinions of [Company Name]."

Attribution to Others

The company's clients, suppliers or business partners should not be identified or referenced without their prior written approval. When you need to discuss a matter related to a company stakeholder, use words like "a client" or "Client A", "Supplier B" and so on, but make sure the discussion cannot be identified as being obviously related to a specific stakeholder.

When you do have written permission to reference a stakeholder make sure you do so in a positive and supportive manner, and keep a record of the written permission.

When referencing a public source of information such as a blog or material published by a company, always reference the source of the material.

Company Proprietary, Confidential and Sensitive Material

Do not disclose company proprietary, confidential or sensitive material. Sensitive material may cover a broad range of information including, for example, company financial performance, strategies, unannounced new product launches or developments, management decisions, trade secrets and so on. Exercise good judgment, and when in doubt, ask.

Client, Supplier and Business Partner Proprietary, Confidential and Sensitive Material

Just as in the case of the company, do not disclose company stakeholders' proprietary, confidential or sensitive material.

Copyright Material

Do not post material copyrighted by others unless you have license from the copyright holder to do so. Many forms of material may be copyrighted including public sources of information, blogs, information in comments and replies and many others.

Copyrighted material may not always bear the international copyright symbol.

Do not use anything other than short excerpts for the purpose of elaborating on a point or making alternative points in ways that are intended to be educational for your users. Always cite the source.

Be Transparent

The above cautions about proprietary, confidential, and sensitive information, be open, honest and transparent. Overly cautious statements such as the wording you often see in official press releases from a company that is having some sort of problem are often viewed

with great suspicion, and readers often feel there is information being held back or some sort of manipulation occurring. Try to be as direct and open as a situation reasonably permits.

Be Yourself

With the above cautions in mind we encourage you to “be yourself”. Don’t try to write in a forced or overly stiff manner. Try to write in your conversational voice, and whenever possible write in the first person. A paragraph that starts with “I had a very interesting conversation with a client last week about...” is much more engaging than a dry treatise on whatever the subject was.

Engage

One of the greatest values of social media is that it offers a great opportunity for the exchange of ideas and information. Make sure your writing style is warm, open and encourages engagement. Ask for comments and replies.

Read the blogs of others that are in your area of interest or expertise. This will help you learn, and leaving comments or replies on these blogs, especially on subjects where you are an expert, will help you find your online voice and style.

Your comments are helpful and respected by the original author. By sharing your ideas you show appreciation for the work of others, and your ideas can be the source for future new material by the author.

Competitors

Never criticize a competitor or their products or services.

Over-Promotion

Be careful to not over-promote your company or your company’s products or services, as this approach tends to lack credibility. Describe in a neutral way any features or benefits you wish to discuss. Describe in a neutral way any advantages of a particular feature, and compare in a neutral way both advantages and disadvantages of a feature relative to a feature on another product. All products and services have strengths and weaknesses; try to discuss these aspects in an unbiased way, and do not refer to a competitive product directly.

Respect, Trust, Authority and Professional Friendship

Publishing great content that is valuable or interesting to others builds respect for you as a publisher. Publishing in a professional manner builds trust in you as a publisher. Together, respect and trust equals Authority. Think of Authority as a valuable asset like a capital resource. Every time you publish you have an opportunity to increase or decrease your authority.

If you create high Authority and write in a warm, open and engaging manner you have an opportunity to create new “professional friendships”. Like Authority, professional friendships have high value, both in terms of life in general and also as a user enters their sales-cycle.

Keep these principles in mind when publishing.

Be Helpful

Try to create content that is useful, meaningful and helpful to others.

Be Respectful

Always be respectful of others and of their opinions. Don't start or escalate arguments. A vigorous exchange of different opinions can be healthy as long as they occur in a respectful environment. By maintaining a respectful tone, others will often adopt and follow this productive approach. Be a leader on the subject of respect, not a follower.

Learn

Use your online experience to learn and improve yourself.

Do No Harm

Always seek to be productive, and avoid any actions that may harm others or the reputation of others.

Correct Your Mistakes

When you see a mistake that you have made or when someone points out a mistake you have made, be quick to acknowledge it and correct it.

Judgment

No one can write a social media guideline that covers every possible social media subject. If you feel you are getting close to one of the lines mentioned or into a gray area, then you probably are. Step back for a moment to think it through, and err on the side of caution. You can always re-post or make an update later if you become more comfortable, but remember you can never "take back" what you have already published.

When in doubt, reach out to other trusted peers or managers for advice and ideas.

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