



ebook • **Basics**



Social Media Policy


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Your Social Media Policy

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Social media policies and guidelines don't have to be complicated. With the average American spending six hours a month on Facebook, social media is an essential part of millions of Americans daily lives. Because of the growing popularity in using social platforms human resource professionals and companies are becoming more aware of the importance of a solid social media policy that provides guidelines and structure to new and current employees. While important, your policy doesn't have to be a twenty-page novel to be effective. All employee policies as part of your employee handbook should be written not only to inform your audience, protect the company from liability, but also as a marketing document that is short, to the point, and interesting to the audience in which it was created for. And providing an employee handbook and policy manual, which does all these things, can be extremely hard to accomplish especially for someone with limited knowledge on the interworkings of online social platforms.

Social Media Policy Myths

One of the greatest myths surrounding social media policies is that companies need to create a separate social media policy to communicate to their employees about proper



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procedure surrounding social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, as well as the thousands of other social and community sites that exist. Often times, your social media policy is already in place within your company's policy and procedure manual. It may just needs a few nips and tucks.

To make communication clear and direct to your intended employee audience, it is important to display your policy in an area that is easy to find, read, and understand within your employee handbook and policy manual. Most often, social media polices are placed in one or mentioned in one or all of four areas of the employee handbook and policy and procedure manuals:

1. Communication
2. Internet Usage
3. Social Media
4. Employee Code of Ethics

It's pretty self-explanatory why your social media policy might be included in any of these four suggested areas. Social media postings are a form of written, readable, or viewable communication that is posted on the Internet. One of the most common concerns when I speak with companies about social media is employee's actions and a company's control surrounding what their employee's write and when they do it. I will discuss this particular topic later in this e-book. Prior to writing your social media policy, I encourage you to research and learn about how your employees, customers, and competition are using social media in their daily lives. This doesn't have to be along





and drawn out process. Research should always be ongoing so that your leadership team, Marketing, Human Resources, or even Legal can respond to situations quickly if a crisis arises. Proper monitoring and research will give you and your company a better idea of how to incorporate social media into your company strategy without reinventing the wheel or spending time in areas that are un-necessary. Companies can certainly conduct research themselves into these areas or hire a company or subject-matter expert or consultant to assist them in learning or understanding the research and monitoring process. My personal recommendation is to bring in an outside consultant or firm who can train your team assist on ways to online mentions throughout the World Wide Web.

Companies can certainly conduct these searches in house. Like any project that involves an outside agency or third party, It is important to be very thorough when interviewing someone to assist you in such an important project. While blogs, forums chats have been around for twenty years; the rise in popularity of social media has created a extremely large and lucrative business industry. Be sure to ask questions, visit the company and consultant's own social profiles and ask for professional references before signing a contract.

Beginning Your Research

To get you and your company started in the research process, I recommend considering the following websites and tools to get you started in learning more about





what is already being said so you can plan a strategy of how and when to respond and act.

- **BackType.com.** This website helps you monitor key word and brand mentions made on blog comments throughout the Internet.
- **Google Alerts.** Email alerts from Google.com/alerts can be sent daily or even hourly to your email inbox. Google notifies you after a series of key words in which you select are found by their online web crawlers.
- **BoardTracker.com.** This website monitors mentions of selected key words on forums and boards. There are millions of forums and boards some specific to an industry, local region, or area of interest.
- **Twilert.com.** Twilert monitors the popular microblogging site Twitter and alerts you to mentions via email. Much like Google, Twitter is a powerful search engine that can be used as a research tool in real time. The more than 100 million users post comments in rapid succession. Most profiles and their information are searchable on the Internet.

Employee meetings and focus groups in a comfortable and open environment are another effective way to learn how your employees are already using these online tools either for personal or professional use. It is important for these meetings to be conducted in a manner where employees feel able to talk freely and openly about how they are accessing these sites during work whether from their desktop work computer, laptop, or via mobile smart phone. I recommend other methods of capture information





anonymously to further support your research and monitoring efforts using online survey methods or adding to your annual employee survey. These answers will allow you to make sure to address certain hot points of interest in your policy and training process for current employees when you introduce the new policy as well as new hire training for those during the onboarding and orientation process.

Collaborative Efforts

Often times a company's marketing department, public relations, or information technology departments might already be monitoring or using social media in their external branding or promotional efforts. These departments can share with your situations and scenarios they may have already encountered by having an online presence. As more people are being drawn to online community websites like YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Flickr, chances are someone in your organization has already encountered one of the following:

- An employee or former employee connecting with the company Facebook Fan Page.
- Employees posting corporate event photos on Flickr or sharing videos on YouTube through intercompany email or via corporate servers.
- A manager receiving a LinkedIn recommendation request from a former or current employee.





- LinkedIn or Facebook alumni or customer groups created without corporate consent or knowledge.
- Livestreaming or video recording from portable flip camera of smart phones like the iPhone on the company premises.

By opening discussing with your teams about these potential situations you will learn more about what your policy should or should not include.

Control

The issue of control concerning employees and what they post on social networking sites and when they post is a common question among clients and when leading training sessions. Let me be make it clear that social media is not a fad. As technology has evolved over the last 30 years, we have become more dependent on it as a part of our daily lives and especially in a business context. Consider how technology changes impacted your business like fax machines, the internet, cellular phones, and even email. As someone who grew up with a rotary phone and party line, I am a child of the internet. It's hard for me to imagine life without technology like Google Maps, my laptop computer, and wireless Internet. Without them, I wouldn't be in the industry I am today and certainly, you wouldn't be able to download and read this electronic or e-book I am writing this very moment.

Companies and senior leaders of organizations are under the belief that before the popularity of social networking they had control of what their employees said and didn't





about their managers, company, and working conditions. This is not the case. While social media has gained popularity since the MySpace era, the Internet over the last 20 years and creation of chat rooms, forums, and even blogs has provided individuals an opportunity to publicly air their personal opinions online. These online forums and platforms are not unlike the editorial section of the newspaper, and I have yet to work for a client or company that monitored and scrutinized these like they do the internet. The idea of control is a figment of a company's imagination and negative comments, posts, or videos are often a symptom of a larger problem—a flawed product, bad manager, or a toxic corporate culture.

Over ten years ago, I used chat rooms and dating website to source and recruit candidates for a variety of retail positions. Online profiles existed and even then encouraged their members to include information about their company, position, or industry on these profiles even then.

Social media is much like an employee forum or town hall meeting except that the lines between personal and professional are increasingly blurred. Companies can use these channels to quietly monitor employee opinions, ideas, and activities surrounding their work. Just like the office grapevine, management does not respond to every comment or rumor positive or negative. Managers and leaders keep an ear to the door constantly assessing the situation. Social media should really be no different and your policy can help provide structure and guidance for both your employees and managers on what they can expect and where the responsibilities lie.





Closing

Your social media policy just like the rest of your employee handbook and policy and procedure manual should be custom created with your company and organization in mind. Education, research, and collaboration among other employees and other departments outside of your human resource team are key in ensuring that your policy properly reflects your company's culture, values, and business goals.

As part of this e-book, I have included in the pages that follow three different social media policy examples to get you started. Examples like these three and many others are available on the Internet for all to see. All three of these companies and their policies are very different. Some address blogging, online communities, and potential scenarios just as your employee handbook would mention sexual harassment, the company's tolerance or stance, the different types or description, methods to report violations, and potential outcomes.

Social Media Policy Examples

Example One—Wells Fargo




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Community Guidelines

We welcome your participation as a means of sharing your own experiences, suggesting improvements, and chiming in on the conversation. To keep our community focused, we have set some guidelines:

1. This Community is moderated and all comments are reviewed by us before being posted.
2. To ensure exchanges that are productive, informative, respectful of diverse viewpoints and lawful, we will review all comments and we will NOT post comments that are or include:
 - **Off Topic.** We will exclude comments not related to the subject of the conversation. If you have an idea for a subject, would like to provide feedback, or would like follow-up,  [please write to us.](#)
 - **Spam.** Comments focused on selling a product or service, or comments posted for a purpose of driving traffic to a particular website for personal, political, or monetary gain, will be excluded.
 - **Personal Attacks.** If you disagree with the content, we'd like to hear from you, but ask that you refrain from personal attacks or being disrespectful of others. Malicious intent and or participation not in the spirit of civil conversation will be excluded.
 - **Illegal.** Laws that govern use of copyrights, trade secrets, etc., will be followed.





- **Offensive Language.** Comments including but not limited to, profane or provocative language will be excluded (which means that hateful, racially or ethnically offensive or derogatory content, threats, obscene or sexually explicit language will not be tolerated).
 - **Private or Confidential Information.** Please do not provide any of your specific account details or other personal information. If you have immediate service needs, please contact your bank representative or Customer Service.
3. Please note that we cannot accept comments from individuals under the age of 13.
 4. Comments in HTML format (or URLs) will not be accepted. Please only enter plain text.
 5. Wells Fargo reserves the right to change these guidelines at any time at its sole discretion. The most current guidelines will be available to you online.
 6. Neither Wells Fargo nor Wachovia endorses any comments made by its employees, unless they are an authorized representative of either bank. Neither Wells Fargo nor Wachovia validates assertions or forward-looking statements in the comments. All statements and viewpoints expressed in the comments are strictly those of the commenter alone, and do not constitute an official position of Wells Fargo or Wachovia unless they are posted by the original author (who is an





authorized representative of the bank) or by a subject matter expert responding on behalf of that authorized representative.

7. **Are you a Team Member?** If you are a Wells Fargo or Wachovia Team Member, you MUST disclose your employment status when you submit a comment or question! Whether you are at home or in the office, working for Wells Fargo or Wachovia is a material fact that may influence content and that community members have a right to know about. If we feel the nature of your comment is confidential, shares information not generally available, or recommends an action which could adversely affect our customers or team members, we reserve the right not to post your comment. Thank you for helping maintain the integrity of our community by disclosing that relationship.

8. **Claims of Copyright Infringement** If you believe in good faith that materials available on a Wells Fargo site infringe your copyright, you (or your agent) may send Wells Fargo a notice requesting us to remove the material or block access to it. If you believe in good faith that someone has wrongly filed a notice of copyright infringement against you, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act permits you to send Wells Fargo a counter-notice. [Details on notices and counter-notices are available here](#) and on the Copyright Office site at <http://www.copyright.gov> 

Example Two—Nordstrom Department Stores



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Social Networking Guidelines

Every day, we strive to develop meaningful relationships with our customers and look for ways to improve the service we provide them. In the past, we've connected with our customers directly in person, through telephone calls or in e-mail conversations. Today, social networking tools such as Twitter and Facebook provide Nordstrom the opportunity to start a whole new type of dialogue with our current and future customers, and even with each other.

We encourage approved employees, as representatives of Nordstrom, to use social networking/media as a way to connect with customers and others during working hours. Please talk with your manager before using these tools during non-work hours. And remember that while social networking is fun and valuable, there are some risks you should keep in mind. In the social media world there is often no line between what is public and private, personal or professional. We've created these general social networking/media guidelines that are important for you to follow as you share your thoughts, views and perspectives—as a Nordstrom representative—in the virtual world.

Use good judgment

- We expect you to use good judgment in all situations—that applies in the world of social networking/media as well.
- Remember to know and follow the Nordstrom Code of Conduct and Nordstrom Privacy Policy.





- Just as we work together to maintain an environment in our stores that is positive, respectful and inclusive for our employees and customers, let's work together to do the same in the social networking/media world.

Be respectful

- Our goal is to help our customers solve their problems and be better informed about subjects they care about, such as fashion and their wardrobes. The best way to accomplish this is by incorporating a positive and considerate approach every time we interact with them.
- Always treat others (including customers, non-customers, shareholders, co-workers, vendors and competitors) as you would expect to be treated.

Be transparent

- Even though you are approved to represent Nordstrom, unless you are specifically authorized to speak on behalf of the company as a spokesperson, you should state that the views expressed in your postings, etc. are your own.
- Stick with discussing work-related matters that are within your area of job responsibility.
- Be open about your affiliation with Nordstrom and the role/position you hold.

Be humble

- Stay away from boasting about customer service. As we all know, our number one goal is to offer each customer great service but we're certainly not perfect





and we do make mistakes. Let's stay focused on working to deliver great service instead of talking about it.

Be human

- Keep in mind that you won't always know all the answers.
- Don't be afraid to seek help and advice from others.

Be a good listener

- Keep in mind that one of the biggest benefits of social media is that it gives our customers another way to talk to us—to ask us questions directly and to share their feedback.
- A good guideline is to always be doing at least as much listening and responding as you do 'talking'.

Please don't share the following:

Confidential information

- Do not publish, post, or release information that is considered confidential or not public. Online 'conversations' are never private!
- If it seems confidential, it probably is. If you have any questions about what is considered confidential, check in with your manager or Human Resources.
- Do not discuss numbers and other sales figures (non-public financial or operational information), strategies and forecasts, legal issues or future promotions/activities.
- Do not post any merchandise pricing information or comparisons.





If a member of the media or a financial analyst contacts you, as always, refer them to the PR or Investor Relations team through your store operator.

Private and personal information—yours, customers' and co-workers'

- To ensure your safety, be careful about the type and amount of personal information you provide. Avoid talking about personal schedules or situations.
- NEVER give out or transmit personal information of customers or co-workers (including information from Personal Book or other customer lists such as names, addresses, telephone numbers, account numbers or other personal information).
- See the Nordstrom Privacy Policy for more information.
- Don't take information you may receive (such as e-mail addresses, customer names or telephone numbers) and add it to Personal Book or other Nordstrom tools.
- Always respect the privacy of our customers, famous or not, who enter our stores. Never share details about who is in your store or what they purchase when they visit or call.

Please be cautious with respect to:

Images

- Please respect brand, trademark, copyright information and/or images.
- You may use images (products, etc.) that are available on Nordstrom.com.





- It is generally acceptable to post pictures taken of store product, though there are some exceptions. To avoid issues, it might be best to discuss this with your store manager before moving forward.
- Please do not post pictures of others (customers, co-workers, etc.) without their permission.

Other sites

- A significant part of the interaction on Twitter and Facebook involves passing on interesting content or linking to cool items. However, we are ultimately responsible for any content we pass on to our networks. Don't blindly repost a link without looking at the content first.
- Avoid linking to outside websites, unless you trust the source.
- Pay attention to the security warnings that pop up on your computer before clicking on unfamiliar links. They actually serve a purpose and protect you, Nordstrom and our customers from things like computer viruses.
- When using Twitter, Facebook and other tools, be sure to follow their printed terms and conditions.

And if you don't get it right...

- Be sure to correct any mistake you make immediately and make it clear what you've done to fix it.





- If it's a MAJOR mistake (e.g., exposing private customer or employee information or reporting confidential information), please let your manager know immediately so we can take the proper steps to help minimize the impact it may have.

As a reminder

As a reminder, Nordstrom pays for all time worked, which includes the time you engage in social networking activities as a Nordstrom representative. Please ensure that you are clocked in when you're using these tools for business reasons. After-hours business use of social networking activity as a Nordstrom representative should be pre-approved by your manager, and your time should be turned in to Human Resources.

In conclusion

The purpose for you to become more actively involved with social media is to find additional opportunities to connect with your customers and share information with them that they enjoy receiving. If you are a front-line salesperson, this should just be another valuable tool that will help you further accomplish that goal—but it shouldn't take away from the very important person-to-person contacts that you will continue to make each day. If you have any questions about using social media to connect with your customers, please speak with your manager or Human Resources.

Above all, remember to have fun and be yourself! We look forward to seeing you online!

Example Three--Baker Daniels Law Firm

Social Media Policy Guidelines



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1. Remember that the Internet is not anonymous, nor does it forget. Everything written on the Web can be traced back to its author one way or another and very easily. Information is backed up often and repeatedly and posts in one forum are usually replicated in others through trackbacks and reposts or references.
2. There is no clear line between your work life and your personal life. Always be honest and respectful in both capacities. With the ease of tracing authors back from their posts and the amount of information online, finding the actual identity of a poster from a few posts and a screen name is not impossible. This creates an avenue for outside parties to link your personal writings to those you've done in a professional capacity. Always write as if everyone knows you. Never write anything you wouldn't say out loud to all parties involved.
3. Avoid hazardous materials. Do not post or link to any materials that are defamatory, harassing or indecent.
4. Don't promote other brands with the firm's brand. Do not promote personal projects or endorse other brands, causes or opinions. Be sure to respect third party copyrights. If a personal opinion must be posted, clearly state to all readers this does not represent the opinions of the firm.
5. Keep confidentiality. Do not post any confidential or proprietary information in regards to the firm or its clients.
6. Don't pad your own stats. Do not create anonymous or pseudonym online profiles in order to pad link or page view stats. Also, do not comment on your own or another's





posts in order to create a false sense of support.

7. Always trackback. When reposting or referencing a post on one of the firm's online sites, provide a link to the original post or story.

8. Identify yourself. When relevant, identify your affiliation with the firm and your area of concentration.

9. Do not pat yourself on the back. Do not post self-laudatory statements regarding your work nor the firm's.

10. Do not qualify your work. Do not post statements regarding the quality of your work nor the firm's.

11. Do not approve recommendations or testimonials. Recommendations and testimonials violate the ethics rules under which the firm operates. Individuals with the firm do not need to discourage others from posting promotional materials about the firm, however, the firm cannot link to them or have them posted on the firm's sites.

12. Do not promote successes. Don't report firm results or outcomes or use words like "successfully", "favorably", "won" or "prevailed" in describing the firm's representations.

The promotion of successes is prohibited for law firms. It also violates the ethics rules under which the firm operates. 13. Do not return fire. If a negative post or comment is found online about the firm or yourself, do not counter with another negative post.

Instead, publicly offer to remedy the situation through positive action. Seek help from the Client Services Department in defusing these types of situations.





14. Do not offer or appear to offer legal advice. Individuals with the firm should not give legal advice or otherwise form attorney-client relationships in using social media. Formation of these relationships must be done only through the firm's regular procedures to avoid conflicts and other ethical problems.

*Receive your **complimentary** social media policy assessment by Xceptional HR by contacting us at (405) 912-4885 or jessica@xceptionalhr.com. To learn more about the HR ToolBox e-book and education series visit www.blogging4jobs.com/hr-toolbox.*



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Resources

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