Social Media Policy
Creating a Social Media Policy for Property Management

By Charity Hisle, Socially Engaged Marketing

Why Develop A Corporate Social Media Policy

Employees are already using social networking websites to express their feelings about everything within their lives. From TV shows to music, from the grocery store to the neighbors, your employees are talking online. Do you know what they are saying about your company and their supervisors? Have you set a policy, or delivered guidelines to your employees about their behavior online and how it can impact your company's reputation? By establishing clear guidelines, your company brand could be enhanced and your reputation should be protected.

Getting Started With Your Social Media Policy

The first step in creating a social media policy is to determine who will be monitoring social networking activity. What departments will be responsible for social media behavior monitoring? HR, PR, Marketing or all three?

Begin by asking these questions about the company:

- What is the goal of the policies?
- Who will follow the policies?
- Which employees are authorized to engage on behalf of the company?
- How transparent will the company be regarding issues, competitors, etc.?

- Are your employees required to disclose that they are employees of the company?
- Will they be endorsing or amplifying the company's social messaging?
- Are they required to during work hours?
- How do you want employees to state their opinions about the industry or the company when they are speaking as themselves off duty?
- Copyright and Content: Who owns the content posted by employees?
- Who will moderate comments?
- What types of comments are allowed and disallowed?
- How will you communicate these policies to your community?

The Law Of The Land

Policies should be flexible but structured. Remember that social media policies should not prohibit activity protected under federal labor law. Here are a few guidelines about what is protected and what is not protected under federal labor law:

- Employee "gripes", unrelated to employee activities, are not protected.
- Discussions of wages and working conditions are protected.
- If an employee makes a comment on Facebook and another employee responds, it is protected activity.
- If an employee makes a comment on Facebook and only their friends respond, it is unprotected activity.

Policies including verbiage such as "employees may not make disparaging remarks about the company" or "all communications at all times, should be professional" are overly broad and prohibited by law, which basically means that you cannot fire an employee based on this type of policy. Visit the National Labor Relations Board for their report on social media policies of employers to get a better understanding of protected and unprotected activity before you start putting it all together. Seek legal advice prior to implementing a corporate social media policy.

> 88.1% of US internet users ages 14+ will browse or research products online in 2012.
>
> ~Hubspot, 2012

How To Develop A Social Media Policy

Explain to your employees why your company is monitoring social networking and other websites. Reputation risk, crisis management, and branding opportunities are all good reasons for establishing a social media policy at the company.

Make sure your policy is customized to your company. Place a copy of the social media policy within the employee handbook and then inform employees that there has been an update to the employee agreement and/or handbook. Establish a point of contact for questions regarding the policies outlined.

Policies should apply to professional and personal accounts, including multi-media, blogs, wikis, forums and social networking websites. Confidential and proprietary information regarding the company and residents should not be shared. Employees that share confidential or proprietary information do so at the risk of losing their job and possibly ending up as a defendant in a civil lawsuit.

For professional accounts, balancing personal and professional can be a challenge. Set guidelines that protect the organization from potential disasters. Remember that current clients, potential clients, current/past/potential employees can view content published online. Encourage employees to refrain from posting demeaning, inflammatory, racist or hot-headed commentary. They should treat every post as if it were public, even when they believe it to be private. Reserve the right to request specific topics be avoided, withdrawn, and removal of post or inappropriate commentary.

Include various employee policies regarding the following topics:

- Passwords and security.
- Social network use policy during hours and off duty, including: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube.
- Public comments on blogs, ratings websites, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Employee blogging, including use and management of a blog, post approval, commentary responsibilities.
- Consider a disclaimer such as "The views expressed are mine alone and do not reflect the views of _____ (company name)." The bottom line is that employees should not imply that they are speaking on the company's behalf.
- Legal issues should be addressed, such as use of logos, trademarks, or copyrighted materials.

> There are 100 new LinkedIn accounts created every 60 seconds.
>
> *~Search Engine Journal, 2012*

Two Sample Policies

Top 10 Guidelines for Social Media Participation at [Company Name]

These guidelines apply to all _____ employees or contractors who create, maintain or contribute to social networks, blogs, virtual gaming, wikis, etc. except those authorized to do so on the behalf of _____. If you use Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, Yelp or other ratings websites, these guidelines are for use by you in order to protect _____ interests, reputation and brand. You speak for yourself, but your actions represent those of _____.

1. You represent _____ at all times, online and offline. Please review the _____ Employee Handbook. The rules for employee conduct apply to everyone within the social world, too.
2. Don't cite residents or talk about specific residents without first obtaining permission from your supervisor. Even mentioning a resident relationship without their prior approval can violate their expectation of privacy.
3. Communications inside _____, including emails among employees and residents, are proprietary to _____. Sharing internal communications may result in disciplinary action.
4. Respect the privacy of offline conversations. Refrain from discussing specifics about work-related matters – situations, names of people, or any other information that would allow someone to identify people, technical details, etc.
5. Respect copyright. Do not post images or other content from another source unless you are sure it is within the public domain or the owner has granted permission. Check websites terms of service to see if there are rules regarding reproduction of content.
6. Do not post material that is obscene, harassing, libelous, defamatory, hateful, threatening, or embarrassing to any person, business or entity. Do not post words, comments, or jokes based on an individual's race, age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion.
7. Never share any information regarding legal matters, cases or attorneys.
8. Confidential information, including contact information, usernames, and passwords should not be shared. Do not publish, post, or release information that is considered confidential or proprietary.
9. Please post a disclaimer on your personal accounts, blogs, etc. stating that the views expressed are yours alone and do not reflect the views of _____.
10. You should not operate under an alias in order to bypass these guidelines. Despite your use of an alias, someone else could reveal your real identity and occupation at any point.

Acceptable Use of Social Media

Social media has become a valuable and powerful means of communication. The _____ views the use of social networking websites as an opportunity to increase communication with our employees and our residents. Social media includes the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Yelp, ratings sites, Google places, etc.

The following guidelines should be adhered to when participating in social media in order to protect the companies interests and your own. When you participate in social networking for the sake of professional purposes, you are representing yourself and _____. It is not our intention to restrict your activities online, but remember that employees, residents, vendors and supervisors often have access to the content you post online.

Users who violate these policies may be subject to discipline, up to and including termination of employment. _____ reserves the right to monitor the internet and request removal of posts that would violate the following policies.

Policy Guidelines:

- Understand and follow the company handbook. Do not post anything that would violate or conflict with other company policies.
- Personal social media activities must not interfere with your work or productivity. During regular business hours use of the Internet or social media should be for business purposes such as marketing, communicating or performing work-related tasks.
- Speak respectfully about current or former residents, employees, vendors and industry persons. Do not engage in personal attacks, even in the defense of the company.
- Do not post commentary or jokes based on an individual's race, age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion.
- When posting on professional networking sites, please identify yourself as an employee of _____ and use a disclaimer stating that your views do not reflect the views of _____.
- Do not infringe on trademarks or copyrights. Remember to cite the original location of content and do not use images or logos without permission.
- Inform _____ in the event you see negative or disparaging content regarding the company online.
- Assume that everything you post online will be read by colleagues, vendors, and residents. You are responsible for everything you post. Review privacy settings and permissions to maintain your personal profiles accordingly.

If you have any questions regarding these guidelines, please see your supervisor.

Additional Resources

Social Media Governance provides a [long list of corporate social media policies](#) available to the public.

Fast Company displays the content of [a few, well-written social media policies](#) that are broken down into easy-to-understand points.

National Labor Relations Board shares their [report on social media policies](#).

About the Author
Charity Hisle is a social media consultant, national speaker and trainer. After several years as a vendor in the Multifamily industry, Charity established [Socially Engaged Marketing](#). She has rapidly become a leading provider of social media consulting and services. She is known for her innovative and unique insights on using social media strategies to attract and retain customers. Her previous experience includes managing a national blogging and social media services program for thousands of customers, directing new media integrated marketing initiatives, planning and implementing Internet marketing campaigns, e-mail marketing campaigns, e-commerce campaigns, and classified listings strategies. You can reach [Charity on LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and Twitter [@CharityHisle](#) or [@SoEngaged](#).

About AppFolio
AppFolio provides web-based property management software that helps you grow your business. Our customers find and retain better residents faster, increase profitability and love the ability to work from anywhere. AppFolio also provides educational resources for property managers including free webinars and articles on our [PropertyManager.com](#) online magazine. You can learn more about AppFolio at [AppFolio.com](#).