



Drafting A Social-Media Policy That Protects Your Business

Insights

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Almost every business today relies on the Internet to help improve its operations. Social networking sites are playing an increasingly important role in how companies communicate with their customers and other interested parties. Social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are rapidly gaining new users.

While these technologies can be helpful, they can also be disruptive in the workplace, and have the potential to hurt a hotel's business. To help limit this risk, companies should take steps to ensure that their employees are properly using social networking sites as they relate to the company. A properly drafted and comprehensive social-media policy can help you manage the potential risk.

What's In Your Policy?

A well-crafted "Blogging and Social Networking" policy should:

- make it clear that online social networking and blogging activities are subject to all of the hotel's policies and procedures, including, for example, the company's policies 1) protecting the confidentiality of company information, 2) safeguarding company property, 3) prohibiting any type of employment discrimination or harassment, and 4) governing use of the hotel's communication and computer systems;
- prohibit employees from disclosing or discussing any of the company's confidential or proprietary information, or any information regarding the hotel's guests or business partners, or details of a particular event, in any online social networking and blogging activities – including even the fact that a particular person is a guest or business partner of the hotel;
- forbid employees from using the name, trademarks, logos, other identifying marks or copyright-protected material of the hotel or its guests in any online social networking and blogging activities;
- ensure that employees do not include their company email address in their personal profiles on social networking sites;
- remind employees who engage in online social networking and blogging activities to remain respectful of the hotel's brand, its employees, its products and services, its guests, its partners, its affiliates, its vendors and suppliers, and even its competitors (and their products and services). Material should not be posted that is obscene, vulgar, defamatory, threatening, discriminatory, harassing, abusive, hateful or embarrassing to another person or entity;

- require employees to make it clear in any online social networking and blogging activities that the views and opinions they express about work-related matters are their own, have not been reviewed or approved by their employer, and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of their employer.

See You Online – Or Maybe In Court

As the laws in this area continue to evolve, employers can reasonably expect to face lawsuits either because of their employees' online activities, or for taking adverse employment actions based on what employees say and do online. In the meantime, manage the legal risks presented by employee social-media use by developing and emphasizing to your staff a policy governing online statements that might affect the company. Many of these suggested policies are based on common sense principles – principles that sometimes don't find their way into the virtual world.

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