

Protect Your Business: Define A Social Media Policy

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Businesses today are accustomed to using the Internet to increase awareness, generate interest in goods and services, educate and inform customers and clients, and keep the general public aware of its core competencies. But social networking sites are a different game than business websites, Google ad words and other online search mechanisms that have been part of business for the better part of this decade. Recently, social networking has taken a front seat in the communications efforts that many companies use. The big three — Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter — are steadily attracting new users, providing businesses with a different platform and new audiences for their products and services.

That's the upside. Yes, the advent of these new technologies is helpful, but there is a downside. They also can be disruptive and distracting in the workplace, with the potential to do damage. Employees who are busy following Twitter or updating their Facebook pages are not busy doing their work. And online chatter between employees about their co-workers can affect employee morale and cause workplace disputes. Beyond the loss of productivity, employee activities on social media sites may expose companies to legal liability.

As more businesses tap into social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn for marketing and other purposes, the line between "professional" and "personal" networking is becoming more blurred. Communication within the company plays an important role as the rules and parameters of a social media policy are implemented. While corporations look to find ways to make social networking a business medium, it is still primarily personal and fun. Companies who keep their employees aware of the difference have a better chance at avoiding legal challenges and negative ramifications in the workplace.

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