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Social Media Policies

Why You Need One

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Social Media Policies

Why You Need One

It has always been important for businesses to protect company and product information from competitors and portray a positive image to customers and the industry. As part of this, companies establish policies to deter employees from sharing inappropriate information.

Social media and electronic communication have changed the business landscape and are a strong part of our daily lives. These means of communication can be very beneficial to companies, but also open a whole new threat that is not covered by your current policies. A Social Media Policy can close this gap and provide employees a better sense of direction when using these means of communication.

What Is Social Media?

Social media is a general term used to describe any means of electronic public communication that may occur via computer, iPhone, smart phone or any other electronic device that can post, read and/or view information available on public websites, e-mails and texts. The number of these sites continues to grow and the social media landscape continues to change. Currently, the most used social media sites include, but are not limited to: Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and personal and public blogs.

Keys To Developing A Policy

It is not necessary for Social Media Policies to be long and detailed documents, but they should address the following items:

- A definition of what social media is and what it all includes. Since new types of social media and electronic communication are continually being developed, it is important to give examples and describe what it includes, but make sure there is room for interpretation and future technological growth.
- A description of why this policy has been developed and how it shall be used. The main purpose of this policy is to make sure all employees understand that social media can be used in either a positive or negative manner.

- The benefits of social media and how your company expects it to be used professionally. It should also address any overlap that may occur between one's professional and personal life. It should describe when and why these sites should or shouldn't be visited during work hours. The intent is not to intrude on employees' personal life outside the company, but make sure the things that are said by them on social media sites while they are a current or a former employee do not negatively influence/effect the company, its employees, past employees and its customers. Most social media comments, posts or videos have a long viewable and searchable life and are hard to remove once posted.
- Describe how this policy may be monitored and the consequences for not following the policy and/or sharing inappropriate information or comments about the company, its products and its employees.

It is important for the human resource department to work with other departments; especially the information technology, sales and marketing departments to make sure the policy covers all aspects of the company and fits future needs.

As with all new policies, it is important to educate employees about the policy and address any of their questions before implementing a Social Media Policy.