DEVELOPING A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR YOUR COMPANY,

Whether or not your company is actively involved in social media, chances are pretty good your employees are regularly contributing to online sites. Immediately Facebook comes to mind, but there are plenty of other locations where inappropriate information could hurt your company's online image. While you might block corporate computers from many of these sites, with the growing usage of smart phones, employees will still find ways to post and communicate. It may be a good time to consider writing and adopting a company social media policy. When considering such a policy keep in mind that education is key. Educating employees on the company social media policy will help to curb mishaps.

You may wish to form a group consisting of some key employees to help you formulate your Social Media Policy. Often employees have ideas of what their co-workers are into and are considering and can offer sound judgment based on their workplace experience. This also helps to foster relationships with employees and lets them know you value their opinions.

First of all your company needs to establish its own definition of social media. Clearly define what you consider to be social media. This would not only include sites, but also blogs and wikis. Clear policies and boundaries must be included to have a successful policy. Your policy should define what employees can do on social media as well as what they should not do. Include best practices and offer alternatives. For example, it would be inappropriate to say "We had a $7,000 day today!" Instead, say "What a great day we had today. Thanks to all who shared in such a great event."

You may wish to include some or all of these items in your company policy.

- Spell out the types of damaging information such as racial or ethnic slurs or jokes, proprietary or confidential information or financial information that should not be shared. Merely having a company confidentiality agreement may not be enough.

- Respect copyrights or trademarks. Internet postings must respect copyright, privacy, fair use, financial disclosure, and other applicable laws.

- Be thoughtful about how you present yourself.

- Be accurate in all postings.

- Be careful with personal information, not only your own, but co-workers as well as business partners and guests.

- Do not use company logos.

- Do not use social media for recruiting purposes. Leave that to the HR Department.

- Not speak as if they are representing the company. Make sure employees understand that their social media usage on behalf of the company will be monitored. Also remind them of employee guidelines, and how their behavior using social media is governed by this.

- Respect audience.

- Respect competitors.

- Respect customers and do not share about dealings with clients and customers.

- Don't write about confidential conversations.

- Provide resources for employees who might have questions on social media postings.

- Provide a clear and precise plan for dealing with violations. Maybe you will decide the first infraction should be a warning with general counseling on how to better present a post. The scale should be progressive, maybe ultimately resulting in termination.

    After formulation of your plan, you will want to present it to your employees in such a manner that they can clearly understand and follow the new company policy. Until such time as it can be included in the company handbook, I would suggest a special sheet where each employee can individually indicate that they have read, understand and agree to the new plan. This should be dated by the employee and placed in each employee's folder.