



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY 101

Guidelines to Empower your Employees
to use Social Media Marketing while
Protecting your Corporate Interests.





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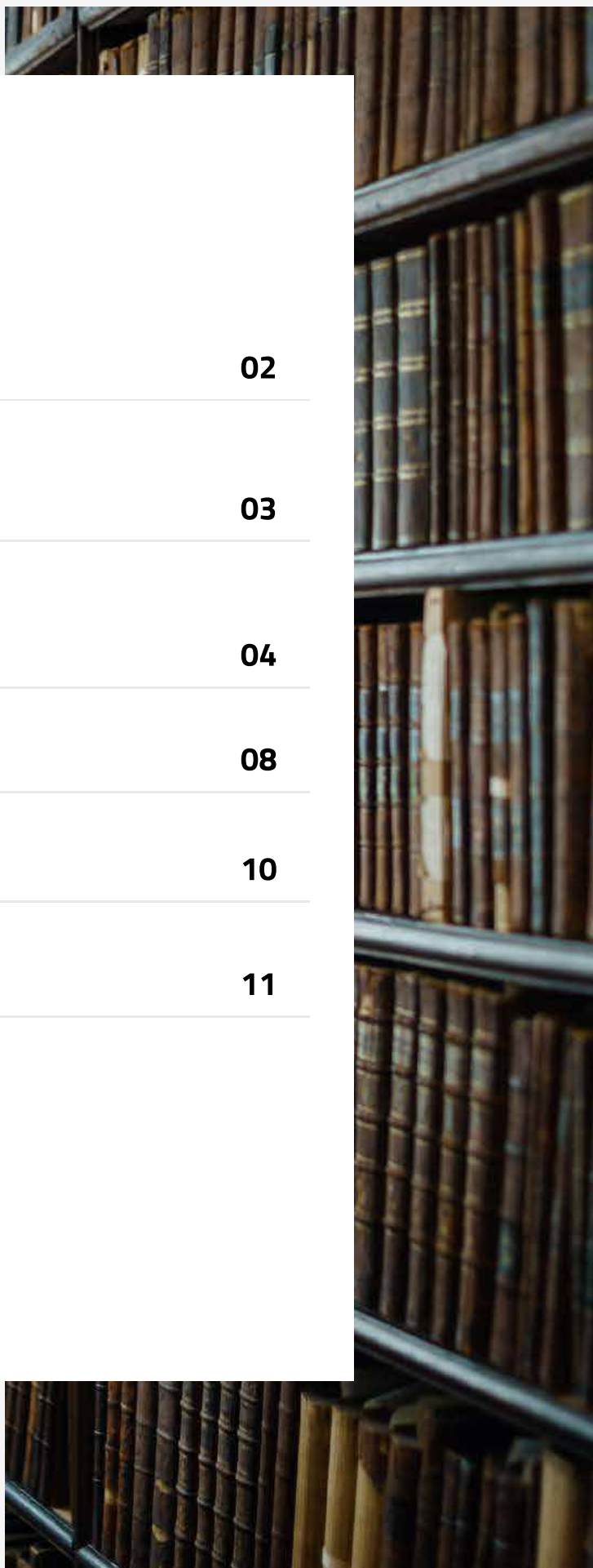
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Introduction

It isn't a matter of choice anymore. In a world where purchase decisions are driven by reviews and ratings, there's no self-respecting company left standing without a social media presence. In fact, as millennials increasingly flood the workplace, social media activity is no longer solely a marketing function. It's something that the whole workforce expects to be a part of.

Welcome to the age of social media marketing, where you empower your employees to identify, engage, and foster new customers by leveraging their social networks. The best part? In a world where entire brand images are defined by public opinion and user-generated content, you now have the power to influence conversations and perceptions.

However, it's essential to establish a social media policy covering basic guidelines, practices, and tips to protect all participants' interests. And that's where the problem lies.

Most policies are either too stringent or too lax, both of which lead to disastrous outcomes. **While overly stringent policies intimidate and discourage employees, the lax ones lead to loss of control over brand perception.**

With a clear policy in place, you minimize the risk of public, social embarrassment and, even worse, legal complications triggered by a slip-up. Social media guidelines help ensure the best portrayal of a brand's image online.



In this guide, we give you the top eight points to cover in your company's social media policy, and a few best practices to keep in mind during social sharing.

It's just social media. Why have a policy?



Social media marketing is an incredibly powerful tool. However, while leveraging your employees' networks to reach a wider audience base is a smart move, it's important to remember that every post made on a company's behalf represents its brand image. This is where a good social media policy becomes crucial.

An effective social media policy ensures a disciplined approach while leveraging an inherently volatile medium, minimizing the possibility of committing mortifying faux pas or triggering blatant conflagrations. What's more, not all company content is meant to be shared. A social media policy helps control/ prevent sharing of certain information by ensuring a structured process to social sharing via employees.

So, what exactly should go into a social media policy that encourages employee participation, doesn't intimidate them, and yet is effective?

Eight basic pointers that you should consider while drafting your social media policy

1 Be Authentic

Encourage employees to use their personal accounts while sharing updates – this helps your audience identify them as real, credible sources, which in turn establishes customer trust. In an age where all informed customers know the reality of paid likes and chat bots, authentic, human interactions are valued above all else.

Examples of what employees should be encouraged to share include the following:

- Company blogs
- Press releases
- Corporate videos
- Articles by thought leaders, along with the company's take on them
- Publicly available industry reports

It's a good practice to urge employees to identify themselves as your company's representatives, yet show their real personalities via conversational yet professional exchanges – this helps enhance overall customer experience and foster brand health. For the same reason, never force employees into sharing any content.



If done of free will, it will improve the chances of employees actively participating in continued conversations.

2 Be Fair

Be sure to credit sources for any content that isn't yours, unless you want to get slapped with a copyright infringement lawsuit and along with it, a whole new world of unnecessary pain.

While the you're free to refer to just about anything on the internet, the same rule doesn't apply to lifting content off it. And while it's tantalizingly easy – and tempting – to just copy or download images or text and reuse them in your communication, think again.

The moment you copy an image you found online and use it in a blog/ social media post without crediting the source (in this case, the photographer or photo stock company), you're infringing copyright laws and opening yourself up to potentially nasty legal action.



3 Use clear, concise content.

There's nothing more annoying than communication that doesn't get to the point. To increase your chances of establishing a connect and fostering continued engagement,

ensure that you keep all posts simple to read and easy to understand.

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Avoid the use of overcomplicated words and industry jargon. The world of social media is nearly limitless, and you don't want to unnecessarily restrict readership unless you want to restrict your potential customer base.

Another point to keep in mind is content quality. To attract as well as retain viewers, you need relevant content. Great content, though largely subjective, in this case refers to rich content packed with understanding of the target audience's reality, and insights and tips that help manage them better. All this, crafted well enough to keep your readers engaged. This helps establish vital customer connect, besides building trust.

Finally, make sure your messaging is consistent across all platforms.

Remind employees that they're the face of the company – so in essence, they should never, ever get personal.

Encourage them to respond to ideas, not the people posting them. Personal opinions can only be expressed if they're in line with the brand image and culture, since these opinions will inevitably shape viewers' perception of your company culture.



4 Listen to your Audience

Since everything happens in real time in the world of social media, it's sorely tempting to give in to knee-jerk reactions in the heat of the moment. That, however, is a huge mistake.



5 Secure all sensitive information

Every company is home to confidential information – whether proprietary or in the form of customer data. Such confidential information should never be divulged.

The best way to avoid unnecessary embarrassment is to come up with a list of acceptable and unacceptable content, which can be used as a ready reckoner before sharing. For instance, blogs, company videos, and press releases are okay to share, but trade secrets, competitive data, and customer/ partner details aren't. Using smart platforms such as SOCXO helps automate such controls, eliminating the risk of exposure.

6 Follow basic ethics and etiquette

These, too, should be in line with the company culture, and therefore its code of conduct. An important point to remember here is to ensure inclusive communication that is race, culture, country, and religion-agnostic, and does not generalize/ marginalize any particular community.

Social media marketing is all about fostering strong relationships, which means that the emphasis should be more on meaningful, wholesome conversations rather than on “winning” petty arguments.

7 Avoid hard selling

There’s nothing that puts off a reader more than a desperate attempt to sell at every opportunity. In fact, hard selling does much more damage than just annoying prospective customers. It actually ends up denting brand image – something that’s very hard to recover from.

It’s for the same reasons that the world has shifted toward inbound marketing, which focuses on building meaningful relationships based on real value.

8 Be responsible

Remind employees to stay away from all unsafe topics – including religion, politics, and any other topic that has the potential to turn into a heated debate. No publicity is any day better than bad publicity, so ensure that all employees keep a healthy distance from even potentially sensitive topics, besides any that they can’t hold an intelligent conversation on. In case a participant asks a question an employee isn’t equipped to handle, they should direct them to someone who can.

Most importantly, train employees to never slam competition – it only makes you look worse if you have to resort to making someone else look bad. For the same reason, employees should never participate in discussions based on rumors and hearsay. It speaks volumes about your brand image when you base exchanges solely on hard facts.

Who's getting it right?

Employee advocacy is no new deal today; there are several companies out there implementing it successfully with the help of effective social media policies – here are a couple of examples for you to draw inspiration from:



Dell

The Dell policy, while comprehensive, is easy on the reader – it encourages employees to have fun while at the same time providing them with sufficient guidance on what to do in case of queries, flagging, and escalations. The granular nature of the policy (it goes to the extent of describing what it regards as social media channels) makes sure that there's little scope for misinterpretation.

The Dell policy also provides employees with a contextual and helpful "larger picture" view of things, such as the expansive nature of a social platform's audience, the potential of something to go viral (and therefore the need to think before posting it), and the seriousness of the policy – and noncompliance. Read the whole policy here:

[READ POLICY](#)



Oracle

The Oracle policy, though a little on the intimidating side, is extremely thorough. While it's debatable whether reminding employees in no uncertain terms that they're not authorized

to speak on the company's behalf would even result in any willing employee sharing socially, at least the policy makes sure that there's no confusion about what isn't allowed. Refer to the policy here for more details:

[READ POLICY](#)

Best Buy

Leading multinational consumer electronics company
Best Buy, too, is clear about what it stands for, and what it doesn't. In addition to the standard clauses about disclosure of affiliation and nondisclosure of sensitive information (there's a separate list of this),

it reiterates its zero-tolerance rule for discrimination of any kind. See the policy here:

[READ POLICY](#)

Ready reckoner

Empower your employees



Clear guidelines let your employees know how to best support and represent your brand, allowing you to leverage the full potential of employee advocacy.

Involve all departments



Social media is relevant to everyone involved in delivering a product/ service. Such inclusion also ensures a good mix of varied perspectives. Again, to ensure relevance, it helps to set up filters to customize feeds.

Write the policy down



Include it in your employee handbook. This will provide employees with a handy reference for whenever they need it.

Outline, but don't dwell on, legal implications



While these are real, over-emphasizing them may end up discouraging/ scaring away your employees. The best bet would be to have a system in place that by default offers employees access to pre-approved content.

Emphasize your company culture



Your brand guidelines should seep into online activity just as it governs offline behavior. Remind your employees that the rules are as applicable to social media as to their physical workplace.

Wrapping it up



Social media is now an essential part of corporate marketing plans. Given the nearly limitless reach of its channels – not to mention the presence of powerful influencers – not leveraging them is simply out of the question.

Granted, no social media policy is 100% fool-proof. But that's no excuse to not exercise a healthy discretion while sharing content on social media. A well-defined policy, backed by awesome content, can help avoid unnecessary misunderstandings, embarrassments, backlash, and lawsuits – while at the same time encouraging employee engagement and advocacy.

The bottom line is, social media is critical to generating buzz about your company. So strap up and take another look at your social media policy – does it really encourage your employees to market, or better yet, evangelize your brand...all the while staying true to your culture?



Employee Advocacy Powered up.

Socxo , a trusted social advocacy platform designed to collate, organize, measure and power up advocacy.

We believe that brands must invest in their own people in order to transform them into powerful micro-influencers, and employee advocacy is the perfect channel to enable greater employee engagement, trust and earned media value for brands.

Leverage Socxo to power up your social communication between people and businesses.



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