

Social Networking Site Use Policy

Most employees (we hope) would never dream of telling a complete stranger about an employer's confidential business plans or the idiosyncrasies of a challenging client. Yet, it's surprising how often they'll publish that information in Facebook postings, blog entries, and other social networking sites, never considering that those entries are publicly available or can move beyond their intended audiences with the click of a mouse. And that's just the unintentional mischief. Some employees intentionally exploit the internet to make anonymous comments that are harmful and frequently defamatory regarding co-workers or employers.

With Facebook and other social networking sites showing no signs of losing popularity, companies need to take measures to protect against this type of behavior. As a first step, we suggest modifying an existing internet usage policy or adopting a new policy governing the proper use of social networking sites. In doing so, private-sector employers may want to consider including the following requirements:

- No derogatory, inaccurate or defamatory commentary about the Company, its clients, or its personnel should be posted.
- Employees should not place any information online referencing the Company, co-workers, or clients without identifying the employee as the party posting the information, and, as appropriate, stating that any opinions are his/her own individually and not a form of official communication from the Company.
- No confidential business information should be posted or otherwise publicly distributed except as specifically authorized by the Company and in compliance with all Company policies related to such information.
- No confidential client or prospective client information should be posted or otherwise publicly distributed except as authorized by the Company and in compliance with all Company policies and ethical obligations related to such information.

A social networking site use policy will not eliminate all problems regarding internet usage, but it is certainly a step towards reducing them.

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