Name of Practice

Social Media Policy

for employees and contractors

Date 2016

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1. Introduction

The explosion of social media combined with the trend towards flexible work patterns has increasingly blurred the boundaries between employees’ private lives and their interactions at work.

Information and opinions can be spread quickly, widely and sometimes internationally through online channels and can easily be subject to distortion and misrepresentation.

Once online material is in the public domain, there is little control or influence over how it might be used or modified.

Popular social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, provide a medium for communication that is open to our customers, stakeholders and our employees.

Firm and fair guidelines on the acceptable use of social media are essential to protect our business and our people.

2. Purpose of this policy

This policy has been developed to protect (Name of Practice) staff, assets and reputation through clear protocols for employee and contractor use of social media in official and personal capacities.

This policy is a set of common sense boundaries for acceptable use of social media channels by employees and contractors.

All employees are responsible for reading, understanding and adhering to this policy.

It is a condition of appointment that external contractors understand and adhere to this policy during their period of engagement by (Name of Practice). When appointing external contractors, (Name of Practice) employees must ensure that contractors are made aware of the policy.

For the purpose of simplicity, the terms ‘employee’ and ‘employees’ used throughout this document apply equally to all (Name of Practice) employees and contractors. This includes casual and agency staff, vacation and work experience students and contractors engaged by (Name of Practice).

3. What is social media?

Social media describes a range of channels, platforms tools and methods of electronic communication and interaction between people online.

Social media encompasses popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and also includes blogs, forums, wikis, photo galleries, videos and much more.

The term *social media* can be misleading for several reasons. Despite its name, social media is not purely for *social* interaction. Social media platforms and technologies are now widely used by organisations around the world for external interaction with customers and stakeholders, internal employee collaboration, information sharing, employee engagement and to streamline operations and processes.

The word *media* in the term *social media* refers to the various channels (*i.e.* *mediums*) through which information is shared and conversations take place. It has little in common with the ‘print media’ or ‘the press’.

Social media is sometimes referred to as *new media*, *online media*, *social services*, and even *web 2.0.*

Furthermore, with rapid and continued convergence, social media has evolved to encompass channels and applications for mobile devices (*e.g.* mobile phones, tablet computers, *etc*.).

Social media may include, but is not limited to:

* social networks (*e.g.* Facebook, LinkedIn)
* video sharing sites (*e.g.* YouTube, Vimeo)
* photo sharing sites (*e.g.* Flickr, Picassa, Instagram)
* blogs
* micro-blogging sites (*e.g.* Twitter, Yammer)
* online forums, noticeboards, discussion boards and groups
* wikis
* podcasts
* mobile applications
* online gaming platforms
* and more.

As social media is a relatively new and expanding phenomenon, and its platforms are constantly evolving, a common sense approach is required when defining its scope

4. Acceptable use and monitoring

Our employees are expected to maintain the same high standards of conduct and behaviour online as would be expected in a physical work environment.

This includes:

* behaving with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
* dealing appropriately with information, recognising that some information needs to remain confidential
* being sensitive to the diversity of colleagues, peers, customers and our community
* making proper use of (Name of Practice)resources
* upholding our values
* protecting the integrity and reputation of (Name of Practice)
* complying with applicable legislation and laws.

**4.1 Compliance with laws and legislation**  
Employees who publish content on social media channels are largely subject to the same laws and legislation applicable to offline media. These include, but are not limited to, copyright, intellectual property, privacy, financial disclosure, defamation and other applicable laws.

**4.2 Copyright and intellectual property**  
Employees and contractors must respect intellectual property and copyright laws when publishing material via social media.

Unless explicitly allowed, it is a breach of copyright to reproduce another’s work online. Best practice is simply to provide a hyperlink.

Employees must ensure pictures, video and audio material posted by or on behalf of (Name of Practice)is owned by (Name of Practice). Where material owned by a third party is used, written consent must be obtained and records kept.

**4.3 Privacy, confidentiality and information security**At all times, employees and contractors should act to protect the privacy and security of (Name of Practice), its employees, customers, partners and suppliers.

Employees may not publish report on or allude to information or conversations that are deemed confidential or classified, or deal with internal matters without express permission.

It is generally not acceptable to publish confidential information, including but not limited to:

* research
* financial information
* customer and client information
* employee and management information
* sensitive information about (Name of Practice)offices, sites and other infrastructure.

**4.4 Harassment, bullying and discrimination**  
Social media channels have opened the door for online harassment, bullying and discrimination.

This type of Behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Breaches that occur online via social media will be treated with the same rigour as with ‘offline’ or ‘real world’ breaches.

**4.5 Defamation**  
(Name of Practice)employees must not publish material via social media that may cause damage to the reputation of another person, organisation, association or company.

**4.6 Contempt of court**  
Care should be taken if referring to pending court proceedings to avoid publishing material via social media that may prejudice those proceedings.

Enquiries should be made to establish whether there are any applicable court suppression orders prior to commenting on any past, present or pending court proceedings.

**4.7 (Name of Practice) IT network acceptable use and monitoring**Employees must not create, send, access, store or link to material that is:

* offensive
* discriminatory
* sexually harassing
* defamatory
* infringing of intellectual property
* malicious (e.g. viruses or malware).

**Employees need to be aware that their use of** (Name of Practice) **systems and internet connections may be monitored at any time.**

5. Personal use of social media

Employees must take care when using social media for personal use. In an increasingly interconnected digital world, distinctions between private and professional identities are easily blurred.

(Name of Practice) expects that all employees and contractors exercise sound judgement and common sense when using social media.

**5.1 Reasonable personal use**

A reasonable personal use framework allows employees to use social media channels 'within reason'. That is, employees are permitted to access social media during office hours and using (Name of Practice) resources provided it does not interfere in their ability to do their job, impact on essential use of (Name of Practice) systems, or otherwise contravene existing laws or (Name of Practice)

Managers and coordinators may monitor employee of use of social media, and take action where appropriate.

**5.2 Examples of acceptable personal use of social media**

* Checking Facebook at work
* Watching a YouTube video at work
* Following a politician on Twitter
* Using an (Name of Practice)internet connection to check a bank balance or pay a bill

**5.3 Examples of unacceptable personal use of social media**

* Playing Facebook games during work hours
* Commenting on forums that are anti (Name of Practice)industry
* Making anti-social statements about work colleagues on a Facebook page
* Tweeting personal comments about a manager
* Any excessive use of social media such that productivity is adversely impacted

**5.4 Personal use of social media outside of work**

Employees must take care when using social media for personal use, irrespective of the location, time of day, or whether they are using (Name of Practice) equipment or their own.

(Name of Practice) employees are entitled as citizens to comment in a private capacity on public issues. However, they must avoid comment that might be interpreted as an official statement on behalf of (Name of Practice) or that compromises perceptions of the employee’s ability to do their job in an unbiased or professional manner.

Employees should avoid entering online discussions about contentious or ‘high risk’ activities or projects with direct links to (Name of Practice).

**5.5 Separating professional and private use of social media**

Only authorised employees may officially use social media channels on behalf of (Name of Practice). All employees — including those authorised to use social media in an official capacity — should take steps to separate their private and professional online profiles.

Employees using social media in a personal capacity must take due care to ensure that any comments, opinions, photographs or contributions made online are their own, as private citizens.

Employees must ensure that personal comments, particularly those of a sensitive or political nature, cannot be interpreted as an official statement or position of (Name of Practice).

Employees must be aware that contributions made online can almost always be traced to their position at (Name of Practice), whether or not this is explicitly stated. Employees should never publish anything online that they would not be prepared to say in public or at work.

**5.5 Separating professional and private use of social media cont..**

The ‘line’ between personal and professional opinion, interaction and activity online can be a subjective one. The table on the following page outlines some example of acceptable and unacceptable personal use of social media.

**NB: If in doubt ask your Manager for guidance.**

**5.6 Examples of acceptable and unacceptable personal use**

The ‘line’ between personal and professional opinion, interaction and activity online can be a subjective one. The following table outlines some example of acceptable and unacceptable personal use of social media. The examples assume the (Name of Practice) employees are using social media in their own time and on their own equipment.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Scenario** | **Acceptable use of social media** | **Unacceptable use of social media** | **Comments** |
| John and Mia are work colleagues and friends on Facebook. They have several Facebook friends in common including a number of other workmates. Barry, their manager, does not have a Facebook account. | Mia posts a family photo on her Facebook Wall, and John *likes* the post and comments: “How cute!”. | After an argument with Barry at work, John goes home and posts a status update on Facebook: “Can’t believe my dickhead boss today. He’s going down tomorrow.” | Although John’s comments were not immediately available to his boss, they could easily be referred by a workmate. Furthermore, John’s comments were offensive, insulting and threatening. |
| Engineer Co post a video of their new whiz bang product on YouTube. Eric, an employee of (Name of Practice), discovers the video while conducting some research. | Eric gives the video a *thumbs up* and comments “What an amazing piece of technology”. | Eric anonymously comments on the video: “(Name of Practice is in the process of developing something similar – top secret though!” | Despite him commenting anonymously, Eric has divulged confidential information, a clear breach of his contract of employment. |
| Sandip has a twitter account, entitled @ (Name of Practice) techguy. From home one night, Sandip tweets as part of a conversation using the hashtag #ausgovmanufacturingpolicyfail. | Sandip's profile clearly states that all views expressed are his own and do not represent the views of his employer. | Sandip's user profile does not bear a disclaimer, stating only that he is an engineer with (Name of Practice). | On his own time, Sandip can express whatever lawful political view he wants. However, with a user name referencing his employer, and with no disclaimer, he may be taken to have been speaking on behalf of (Name of Practice). |

6. Protocols

The following protocols provide an at-a-glance overview of best practice rules when using social media channels.

These protocols apply to all employees, regardless of whether they are using social media in an official (*i.e.* business) capacity or in a personal capacity.

**DON’T** write anything online that you wouldn’t be prepared to say in public or at work.

**DON’T** discuss work-related projects or issues in non-work environments.

**DON’T** upload photographs or documents that may relate to your work, or are owned by (Name of Practice), unless authorised to do so.

**DON’T** post on blogs, forums or websites as a representative of (Name of Practice), or imply that you represent (Name of Practice), unless authorised to do so.

**DON’T** post on blogs, forums or websites related to (Name of Practice)projects or issues, unless authorised to do so.

**DON’T** impersonate or falsely represent someone else.

**DON’T** reproduce corporate text, images or graphics, including the (Name of Practice) brand, without prior permission.

**DON’T** create or reserve (Name of Practice) profiles, accounts, handles, or placeholders without approval.

**DON’T** abuse, harass, threaten or vilify.

**DON’T** make defamatory, libellous or discriminatory comments.

**DON’T** use obscene, offensive, insulting or hateful language.

**DON’T** infringe on intellectual property or copyright.

**DON’T** post multiple versions of the same view or opinion.

**DON’T** promote commercial interests in official posts.

**DON’T** use official social media channels when upset, angry or intoxicated.

**DON’T** breach other (Name of Practice) policies.

**DO** be polite and respectful of others’ opinions, particularly in times of heated discussion and debate.

**DO** post material that is relevant to the issues being discussed or consulted upon.

**DO** remember that what you do and say online can be traced back to you and to (Name of Practice).

**DO** protect your privacy and the privacy of others.

**DO** separate your personal life and professional life when online.

**DO** seek advice or approval from management when in doubt.

**DO** use your common sense and judgement at all times.

7. Compliance

Non-compliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action, in serious cases, up to and including dismissal or termination of employment.

Unacceptable use of social media may be a breach of employment or contractual obligations or some other contravention of the law.

(Name of Practice) employees who use social media in their own time using their own resources should note that their private comments posted publicly could potentially have repercussions at work.

A person who could be identified as a (Name of Practice) employee who posts offensive, racist or obscene material or who harasses, defames or disregards copyright, even in their own time and using their own resources, could be in breach of this policy.

Such instances will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis with consideration to the possible damage to the reputation of (Name of Practice) and will result in disciplinary action