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Standardize Your Business Social Media Practices

Electronic Design
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Mon, 2013-11-11 12:57

Standards address different aspects of human life including safety, measurement, and technology. They also govern human behavior in the form of standard practices. Today, social media has made its way into our daily lives. It's not only useful for staying connected with our family and friends, it also has a place in business development. Standard practices have emerged for making the most of social media for business. Including these standards into your social media strategy can help ensure your success.

Develop A Social Media Policy

In business, the most important and first step that you should take when you and your coworkers begin using social media at work is to develop a social media policy. The policy provides guidelines and rules to help you know how to use social media properly to meet the goals of your company. It might also provide a measure of risk management for your company, although lawyers may argue whether the policy is protective or not.

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It isn't necessary to develop a social media policy from scratch. Numerous policies are publicly available from leading companies in various industries, including the electronics industry. Starting with one of these and customizing it is the standard way to get started.

Practice Active Listening

An interesting phenomenon has occurred for businesses as a result of social media. Companies can no longer control their messages. Anyone can say anything they want to about you, be it true or not, and it spreads quickly. Social media turns old-fashioned word-of-mouth marketing into a nuclear reaction. Whether you like it or not, people are talking about your products, your brand, and even you as an employee on the Internet and on mobile devices.

Listening to what is being said about you is standard practice for savvy companies. Countless listening tools are available, from free and simple to expensive and sophisticated. It's quite rewarding when you hear that someone has praised your work or your company, and it's motivating when someone criticizes you publicly. Deciding how to respond when someone talks about you or your business is a key aspect of active listening. Again, there are good examples of response systems available for you to use.

Use Professional Conduct

This standard for behavior on social networks should go without saying, but it's a good reminder. When posting any kind of content on social media for business, we should be on our best professional behavior. The electronics industry is populated with intelligent, well-educated, and polite people. One outlier with a negative attitude online can make an entire community uncomfortable. In social media—as with other communications at trade shows, in meetings, and in writing—professional conduct is always respected.

Tell Me Something Interesting

An easy trap to fall into when using social media for business is to use "marketing speak" to push messages at your audience. In general, people do not want to hear how great your products are. Instead, they want to know how your products can benefit *them*. A standard to measure the quality of your content against is to imagine your audience saying, "Tell me something interesting." Putting yourself in the shoes of the audience and then asking yourself if you would find the content valuable is standard practice for publishing good content. If you are an expert in the subject matter, so much the better. If not, research and fact-finding may turn you into one.

Be Authentic

A goal of using social media for business is to gain the trust of your audience. That way, they will appreciate and accept the information you provide, knowing you are honest and transparent. A standard for indicating authenticity is to identify yourself. For example, publishing a blog under the name "geek-goddess" would not be as genuine as "Karen Bartleson."

Another standard, and this one is optional, is to speak in the first person. Your audience may prefer personal pronouns instead of sterile sentences. And for goodness' sake, never buy fake friends to make yourself look more popular. You will only embarrass yourself. True followers and "likes" are earned by offering valuable content.

Keep Your Secrets To Yourself

In an industry such as ours that is fueled by intellectual property, it's not only standard practice, it's also imperative to protect your company's trade secrets and confidential and proprietary information. Imagine how devastating it could be to your company if your revolutionary circuit design or innovative algorithm were published on social media for the whole world to see.

There's an interesting corollary to this as well. If you happen to see that another company's clearly marked intellectual property has been released, you have the responsibility to use the same standard of care to protect it as if it were your own. In other words, don't look!

Honor Copyright

In an open world where social media allows information to be shared readily, copyrighted material can be easily included in content. Images, music, video, pictures, and text can be copied and pasted with a few mouse clicks or finger taps. Legal standards (okay, they're called laws but I'm a standards person) are in place to protect the owner from copyright infringement. If you wish to include copyrighted information in your content, be sure to obtain permission from the owner and include proper attribution.

Show Respect

This is another standard for using social media that goes without saying. The obvious part of showing respect is to never make slurs or post objectionable content. While the definition of "objectionable" varies depending on an individual's level

of tolerance, it's best to think about how much a reasonable professional would accept before becoming offended. Online arguments may heat up excessively, and a cool head can prevent personal attacks. There are respectful ways to disagree.

The unobvious part of showing respect is not spamming your audience. Spam is annoying at best and can have the opposite effect of being useful—it can cause your audience to lose respect for you. What's good about social channels is that people can easily stop following you if they interpret the information you post as spam. When sending regular information through an e-mail-like distribution, allow recipients to opt out.

Oops, My Mistake

As human beings, we are bound to make mistakes. This is true for content posted on social media channels as well. There's a standard practice that has been accepted throughout the ranks of social media practitioners for how to correct a mistake. Acknowledge the mistake and visibly fix it. Never simply delete it and pretend it never happened. Striking out or drawing a line through incorrect content makes what has changed clear. An identifying phrase such as "updated content" is also a good way to make a correction. This practice works well when your opinion changes too. Being open and honest about a mistake or having a change of mind and then taking quick action to noticeably correct it is a good way to retain your audience's trust.

Remember Your Boss

More and more, companies are deciding that the use of social media at work is acceptable, both for a little bit of personal use while on the job and as an actual part of the job. However, plenty of companies still ban social media in the workplace or frown upon it for a variety of reasons.

While at work (wherever and whenever that might be), before you even open Facebook or count the characters in a tweet, it's a very good idea to check with your boss. Find out what your company's policy is about using social media for work. If there is no policy, go back to the first standard practice and have one developed. Because your work and personal lives may be intertwined (mine certainly are), another standard practice to follow is to identify when you are speaking as an employee and when you are speaking as yourself.

Use Your Head

This is the golden rule of standard practices for using social media for business. If you think before putting any content on a social media channel and use common sense, you will probably be just fine.

Pretend that on the front page of the Wall Street Journal or in the headlines on CNN your content along with your face are there for everyone to see. If you feel comfortable or even a little proud, you have probably met the standard for good use of social media. If you feel a little queasy or worried, perhaps you can turn to a seasoned social media practitioner or communications expert for advice.

Following these standard practices to leverage social media for business can help ensure safety and success for companies and employees alike. Social media used the right way for business can be useful, powerful, and fun.

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