

The Society for New Communications Research Best Practices committee has spent the last year researching corporate social media policies.

The project included gathering case studies on companies' blogging policy development and implementation for companies managing internal and external corporate blogs.

From this research, the committee developed a set of SNCR-endorsed best practices. We now present these 27 best practices and policies for developing and implementing corporate blogging policies and guidelines.

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Best Practices for Developing & Implementing a Social Media Policy

From our research, six factors emerged as the highest priority in the successful development and implementation of a corporate blogging policy. These include:

Culture – Foster a corporate culture of openness. Listen to and respect the opinions of employees, customers and other constituencies.

Trust – Employees should be trusted to communicate and develop relationships with customers. Do not review blog posts prior to posting. Trust your employees to be good communicators and to use good judgment.

Training – Provide complete training about how to blog, and review legal issues with employees. Give employees the option of training rather than requiring them to participate.

Transparency – Disclose connections with customers in blog posts. Reveal any commercial or personal connections. Transparency and authenticity is key.

Accuracy – Check facts. Check with colleagues before publishing content that will affect them. If you write about private conversations, ask for permission before publishing.

Comments – Develop and clearly communicate your organization's comment policy. Set expectations and clearly communicate what is and what is not allowed on the blog. Allow negative and positive comments, but restrict inappropriate comments. Write to the person who commented first.

The following best practices will also help organizations to successfully develop and implement corporate blogging policies and guidelines for their employees.

Legacy Guidelines – Use existing human resources and communications policies. Start with the employee communications agreement that is already in place in your organization as the foundation for your new policy. Provide guardrails for employees so they can safely and successfully engage in social media practices. Employees often seek help and guidance when they are considering launching a blog. Provide them the resources they want and need.

Developing New Guidelines – Include company bloggers in the process of developing corporate blogging policies and guidelines. Think ahead in your social media policy development. Develop policies that will extend to other new and emerging communications technologies such as podcasts and video, etc. Once published, distribute guidelines widely, companies that have facilitated wider distribution had their guidelines shared virally.

Legal Department – If you have a legal department, include them in the process. Partner with legal to develop blogging policies.

Employee Communications – If you have an employee communications department, partner with them to develop these new policies.

Whose Perspective? – Clearly define if the blog reflects the employee(s)' opinion(s) or the company's perspective.

The Society for New Communications Research is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) global think tank dedicated to the advanced study of new communications tools, technologies and emerging modes of communication, and their effect on traditional media, professional communications, business, culture and society. For information about becoming a member, visit our website at www.sncr.org or call us at +1-650-331-0083.

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Allow Constructive Criticism – Is it okay for your employees to disagree with you? A culture of open communication will provide the strongest foundation for the successful rollout of a social media program.

Responding to Comments – Set up a mechanism for responding to every comment that requires a reply.

Acknowledge Mistakes – Acknowledge mistakes and fix errors on your blog in a timely and open manner.

Deleting Confidential Information - If information needs to be deleted because it is confidential and was posted in error, delete the information and state why the information has been deleted.

Podcasts – Make sure employees understand that mp3 files are permanent and that it is not possible to remove mp3 files in the same way it is possible to take down blog content. The same permanent nature applies to video files.

Social Media – The policies developed for blogging and company websites apply to employees using other types of social media.

Keep Your Privacy – Consider, define and clearly communicate to employees what information is appropriate or inappropriate to disclose.

Respect Your Audience – Respect your audience's privacy.

Respect Competitors – Do not write about competitors in a negative way. Be respectful of others in your industry.

Remember That Communications Affect Revenue Recognition – Consider this carefully, and remember that that if you talk about a new product, service or feature, you are required to account for the revenue in the quarter that you announced it.

Identify Yourself – Make sure you identify your relationship with the company.

Customer Feedback Loop – Let customers know you listened when they post feedback. Respond appropriately.

Citations – Cite material included in your articles, and provide links to original sources where possible and appropriate.

Don't Break Confidentiality – Do not write about confidential conversations. Communicate this policy clearly to employees. Err on the side of caution. Recommend to employees that if they believe a conversation might have been considered confidential, check with the person/people prior to publishing.

Platform – Companies that choose to encourage all of their employees to blog can either provide a common blogging platform, or invite their bloggers to select the platform and domain of their choosing.

Pace of Adoption – Realize that adoption of social media does not have to happen all at once. It is a process.

As a complement to this Best Practices Tip Sheet, the SNCR is releasing a full report incorporating the complete case studies and analysis of the participating corporations' development and implementation of their corporate social media policies.

For more information, visit www.sncr.org.