

Update Your Social Media Policy To Engage And Empower Employees, Not Alienate Them

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George Milton from Pexels

In an increasingly connected world — one where remote work is very much the norm — employees are engaging and communicating on digital apps, platforms and social media more than ever before. But what does that mean for the employer/employee relationship?

Over the past 15 years, social media has had an outsize impact on the way we work and communicate. And while we've all accepted that theTwitters, Facebooks and even TikToks of the world are here to stay, plenty of employers still struggle to understand how social media can be a benefit to their business rather than a threat.

"Back in the beginning, around 2008, everyone was scared of social media," says Cassandra Bailey, CEO of Slice Communications, a PR and social media marketing agency. "They didn't understand it, they thought it was a thing created by some Mark Zuckerberg kid for other college kids, and they didn't understand what would happen if someone posted something bad about them on the internet. It was tremendous fear and misunderstanding."

That fear led to the creation of nascent company social media policies that attempted to keep employees' online personas separate from their work. Employees were discouraged, for example, from connecting via social media platforms with clients and even managers, or from discussing their work-life online at all. But that was shortsighted, Bailey explains — and over a decade later, many employers have altered their approach.

"We've certainly seen the shift from a restrictive social media policy to a promotional social media policy for employees," Bailey says. "It used to be about what you can't do and what you can't post. But now the big trend is empowering team members and employees to share positive things about who you are as an employer on their social channels."

It's a compelling opportunity in a challenging labor market, but utilizing your employees as brand ambassadors can't be forced, Bailey says. Instead of asking employees to promote your business, give them the chance to opt in and be a part of the initiative.

"The companies that are having the most success are creating clearly defined recruitment marketing strategies, sharing those plans with their workforce and identifying employee champions that they're training," Bailey says. "Show employees how to take on this role, what it means for a brand's content. 'We're going to make a video about you. We're going to promote you on our LinkedIn channels for your birthday.' Be very transparent."

Fiverr, the online marketplace for freelance services, recently put this advice into practice in a new employer brand campaign. The company, which has more than 1,000 employees stretched across the globe, asked its workforce to change their LinkedIn titles to something a bit more playful that best represented them as a colleague, like *Someone who will say "you're wrong" to the CEO* and *Someone who knows when a video call should be an email*.

"The campaign ended up driving over 1,300 applicants to our jobs pages," says Liat Dakar Peles, head of global HR at Fiverr. "It doubled the visits to our LinkedIn page and drove tons of engagement and hype."

Of course, not all use of social media by employees can be an intentional part of company campaign, and it's vital that workers understand how their individual actions online relate to their employer and their career.

"Employees need to understand that they are representatives of the company, and if they're on social media — especially with public accounts — they should make sure they use common sense," Dakar Peles says.

For instances where employees are speaking about or on behalf of their employer, she suggests letting them know that the organization's public relations team can provide guidance and support.

"If employees are ever unsure whether or not to engage in certain conversations, a company's PR team will usually be able to provide valuable insight and perspective," she says. "The same goes for speaking engagements — a company PR representative is usually involved in managing those opportunities, so employees should. Know to involve PR so information and commentary can be discussed appropriately."

Additionally, Bailey supports the idea of offering additional training to help employees understand that their personal actions online can often be seen by employers — present and future.

"Provide your team members with some social media training that says, if you choose to put your workplace on your social accounts, you become a representative for the company," she says. "Now, some people might juggle a personal account and a professional account, but it's still good to let them know that everything they do is seen and heard and can have lasting implications on their professional career. Future employers? They'll look at your social accounts."

Giving employees those kinds of guardrails can enable them to make informed decisions about what they're comfortable posting online, rather than a company overstepping and trying to limit conversations and topics among employees and colleagues.

"You don't want to do what Basecamp did, when they told all their employees they couldn't talk about policy or politics at the office anymore," Bailey says, referencing the tech company's in-office policy shift in 2021 that limited political conversation and chatter — and prompted at least 20 employees to quit.

"It's really important to recognize that social media, for employees, is a choice," Bailey says. "It's a way that we communicate. And among colleagues, connecting and engaging online is very similar to getting happy hour with coworkers. If at that happy hour, a coworker confided in you about a particular issue, how would you respond? So often when we talk about social media, the human aspect is taken out of the equation. But it's just human interaction."