

A Free White Paper for B&M Clients and Friends
Property of Brown & Martin, Inc.
In the spirit of social media, send it to everyone you know

Why You, Yes You, Need a Social Media Policy

By
Leslie Bonk, APR, Senior Vice President
Brown & Martin, Inc.

Let's say that your b2b company isn't actively engaging in social media. The president of the company doesn't Tweet or post to a blog and the marketing department doesn't see a valid opportunity for ROI from Social Media, so no one is advocating a need for a strategy in that arena.

Yet, if you were to ask your employees whether they have Facebook pages, are on LinkedIn, post videos on YouTube or post photos on Flickr, you'd find that the majority of them are actively engaging in one or more of these activities. And if they list the name of the company where they are employed, their actions have the potential to reflect on you. That's why it's a good idea to develop some basic guidelines for your employees.

While there can be problems or issues that arise when employees are on the social Web, most employees have common sense. You need to find balance between protecting your company and its products, without impeding your employees' freedom of speech.

If you think about it, Social Media guidelines are really just an extension of your current employee handbook or traditional media guidelines.

Following are a few sample Social Media guidelines:

- **Be Responsible:** Blogs, tweets and comments are public content and may be monitored by anyone, including supervisors, fellow employees and competitors. Everything you say can (and likely will) be used in the court of public opinion--forever. So always assume you're "on the record." Don't post anything that you wouldn't say to someone's face or in the presence of others. Don't use profanity or demeaning language. If you wouldn't be willing to see your post published in a newspaper with your name and photo beneath it, don't publish it on the internet.
- **Be Careful:** Public companies must follow strict SEC and state guidelines regarding the publication of confidential and trade information. Employees who share confidential or proprietary information do so at the risk of losing their job and possibly even ending up as defendants in civil lawsuits. If there's the slightest doubt that the information you are posting may be confidential, obtain proper approval before posting.
- **Be Honest:** If you're posting or commenting about your company's products or services, be sure that those who read your comments know that you work for the company.

- **Be Proactive:** Should you find negative posts or comments about your company, positively address them, again telling your audience that you are employed by the company. If you aren't comfortable responding, alert the marketing department so they can form a response. And, if you become the point of contact for a customer complaint, stay with it until it is resolved.
- **Be Accurate:** Make sure your posts are accurate before they are public, and correct erroneous posts when needed. When making claims, always refer to your sources, using hyperlinks when possible. Always give proper attribution (by linkbacks, public mentions, re-tweets and so on).
- **Add Value:** Posting content with helpful information or good insight is encouraged. It helps position us as experts in our field.

There are many Social Media policies are that posted on the web. On the [B&M](#) web site, we have posted links to many Social Media policies from companies such as the American Red Cross, ESPN, Yahoo and IBM.

Should your employees show a lot of interest in Social Media, you may want to consider some training about what tools are available, how to use them and what the norms are for posting to Twitter or Facebook. You can use one of your own employees (a power user) or bring in an outside expert.

You may also want to begin monitoring social media posts for keywords that have relevance for your company. These keywords will likely be similar to the key words that are in your Web site meta tags. (If you're not sure what meta tags are and whether you have them, contact B&M and we'll explain it to you and show you how to add them to your Web site.)

There are dozens of free Web sites that allow people and companies to search social media posts for key words including socialmediamention.com and yacktrack.com. An organization may also opt to pay for a service, such as Cyveillance or Cision, to monitor social media mentions.

The most important piece of advice I can give you with respect to Social Media, is to listen before you talk. Before entering any conversation, understand the context and who you are speaking to. The second most important piece of advice I can give you is, if you wouldn't want your mom to see your tweet, blog or post, don't push send.

Brown & Martin has helped companies of all sizes develop Social Media guidelines and have conducted employee meetings on the subject. If your company would like assistance in these areas, please contact me at leslie.l.bonk@bmpr.com, find me on LinkedIn, tweet me @moxxy333, or use my favorite "old-style" form of communication, the telephone (262) 789-1565.