

Creating a Social Media Policy

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It is essential for employers to develop a social networking policy, especially in light of the many legal issues that may arise. Employers must consider the many goals that the policy intends to cover, such as:

- Protecting the company's trade secrets, confidential, proprietary and/or privileged information;
- Protecting the company's reputation;
- Protecting the privacy of employees; and
- Establishing guidelines for whether use of social networking sites during working hours is permitted, and if so, under what circumstances.

Employers must also consider the parameters in developing a new policy, such as:

- Urging employees to go to human resources with work-related issues and complaints before blogging about them;
- Setting forth the potential for discipline, up to and including termination, if an employee misuses social networking sites relating to employment;
- Establishing a reporting procedure for suspected violations of the policy;
- Enforcing the policy consistently and with regard to all employees;
- Reiterating that company policies, including harassment and discrimination policies, apply with equal force to employees' communications on social networking sites;

- Reminding employees that the computers and email system are company property intended for business use only, and that the company may monitor computer and email usage; and
- Arranging for employees to sign a written acknowledgment that they have read, understand and will abide by the policy.