

# DO YOU GIVE A TWEET ABOUT YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE? YOUR REPUTATION (AND WORKFORCE) COULD BE AT STAKE.

In addition to providing rich recruiting opportunities for employers, the Internet presents innumerable venues for job seekers and employees alike to discuss employment details, share experiences, and air grievances. Because of these things, and the fact that our business hinges on the ability to attract and retain talent on a national scale, we're paying a lot of attention to our online reputation. And if you're as passionate as we are about attracting the best talent in the market—you'll do the same.

## YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU

Peer reviews are both a powerful motivator and de-motivator for job seekers. Not long ago, word of mouth reviews were limited by the speed in which one person could talk to another person or group of people. Good or bad, a company's reputation in one town would rarely spill over to other locations. However, with the advent of social media, it's rare—and nearly impossible—to contain experiences to one location.

## THE SOCIAL WORKPLACE

Employee camaraderie extends outside the walls of your buildings, and so do discussions about employment with you. Undoubtedly, your employees are talking; and, because these discussions often happen online, they're subject to public viewing (and sharing, and re-tweeting, and blogging) which ultimately impacts your reputation and ability to attract new talent or retain current talent.

It's important employers protect their legal rights and interests through use of a social media policy, because a well-crafted and communicated policy will work to protect your company by setting clear expectations related to online behaviors, while also respecting the rights of your employees. There are, however, legal limits to how much online behavior you are able to control through your policy.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has decided several cases in favor of employees with respect to electronic and on-line discussions and comments by employees pertaining to wages and working conditions, reasoning that the discussions, comments, or similar electronic communications are protected under the National Labor Relations Act under which employees have the protected federal right to engage in concerted activity with regards to wages and working conditions, whether or not those employees are represented by a union.

Even companies with an air-tight social media policy are not immune to lapses in employee judgment. Whether intentional or not, an employee's online activity could publicly expose details of employment situations at your worksite, which, if negative, may deter potential candidates from applying. For this reason, we suggest implementing internal employee surveys that allow you to gauge workforce sentiment and give employees an opportunity to provide feedback—in the hopes they will air grievances privately and not online.

## RECENT CHANGES IMPACT PUBLIC CONSUMPTION

Google and Twitter have a deal that allows Google to display tweets in real-time—to the tune of about 9,000 tweets per second on its homepage. This means Google displays information as soon as it is posted; no delays, no overlooked posts, no need for the Google user to be a member of Twitter or to even go to the site to search.

*So, what does this mean for you as an employer?*

Two things.

First, this means you are competing with more information that Google—the world's most trusted and widely used search engine—is disseminating. No one puts as much thought into your reputation as you do, and you are competing for trust against information others posted impulsively in 280 characters or less. This means that people, even those who may simply set out to search for your phone number, will be faced with a real-time stream of information about you. This stream can be especially poignant if you are the subject of negative discussions.

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Second, this means you need a response plan. Because public tweets containing your company's name are visible to anyone who "Googles" you or a similar search term, you need to know what people are saying about you. And you need to be prepared to respond quickly—to the good, to the bad, and to the ugly.

## STRATEGIC RESPONSES

Providing superior customer service and following a strategic response plan has always been the driver of our corporate customer service strategy, and that extends to social media.

For years, we have had a policy to publicly address complaints on social media. Instead of deleting negative comments, we provide relatively immediate responses online and steer the rest of the conversation offline. This both protects the upset party—who often needs to share personal information in order for us to correct a problem—and our company, because we are able to stop additional negative actions, resolve issues, and restore goodwill quickly. It shows others that we care about our customers' experiences and take the time to solve problems and, more importantly, it gives happy employees the opportunity to come to our defense—one of the best scenarios possible. In the beginning, this was a small initiative, but, as we grew, we hired a dedicated team to monitor our social media sites, respond to public and private grievances, and connect people with the correct internal resources.

Like ours, your response plan should include a continued analysis of customer feedback. This feedback is valuable as it can offer insight into the minds of your customers and expose areas for potential improvement. For example, comments collected online from job applicants helped us identify internal customer service and response time issues and served as the impetus for the formation of a formal corporate-wide customer service tracking initiative, the Purple Index. Each week, we survey a random population of new applicants—by phone or email survey—and track their responses. Our branches are then assigned a Purple Index score based on the responses and, when necessary, assigned action items to improve customer service or response rates.

## WE GET IT. WE'VE BEEN THERE.

We know firsthand managing your online presence and reputation can be a full-time job. Some companies have the luxury of an entire department dedicated to managing social media, but, the reality is, most simply don't have the resources. Whether you have a social media department of 10 or you manage it by yourself, it's worth whatever time and attention your company can muster. So, plan and prepare, consider strategies like those that have worked for us, and do your best to make social media work to your advantage. After all, your reputation depends on it.

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