

Title Is Your Social Media Hurting Your Career?

Genre (e.g. Role Play; Client Communication Plan; In-class exercise, etc.) research exercise and individual career analysis

FAQS

1. *Aren't all social media policies the same?*

Not by a long shot, as this assignment reveals. Since social media itself does not fall under current standardized law, companies have to start from Ground Zero to build these policies. They wind up being very different. In fact, in many large corporations, such as large banks, different departments can have different policies that correspond to the type of work that department does. The institutional banking department will require stricter social media guidelines than the branch banks will, for example.

2. *Are companies allowed to search an applicant or an employee's social media?*

Yes. No law exists that prohibits such a practice, although employers can run the risk of being guilty of hiring discrimination based on race, gender, and other EEOC categories for doing so. The burden of the proof that these items kept the applicant from getting the job lies, however, with the applicant. Many recent surveys have indicated that roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of all mid to large-sized companies do search social media before offering a job to a candidate; approximately half of them monitor the social media of their employees.

Recently many companies have reported asking applicants and employees for login information for their social media as a condition of employment; that is legal in all states but Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, Illinois, Michigan, Utah, and California as of the time of this writing.

3. *Should companies monitor their employees' social media?*

This question is a great one to pose as a discussion topic to go along with this assignment. To help start the discussion, giving the students a copy of an August 2014 *Wall Street Journal* article on this topic is helpful: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/should-companies-monitor-their-employees-social-media-1399648685>

4. *Can employees be fired as a result of their social media?*

Yes. Remember the two Domino's employees who posted a video of themselves doing disgusting things to a customer's pizza? On a more serious note, often a social media post may unknowingly violate another law, such as a nurse posting about a trauma case she had worked on that day. That posting would violate HIPPA, a violation that could incur thousands of dollars in fines for the hospital she worked for. If the company fires the employee for the post, not only does it remove itself from possible legal action but also sends a message to the other employees to be careful about what they post.

These articles also offer helpful advice for class discussion on this topic:

<http://hiring.monster.com/hr/hr-best-practices/small-business/social-media-trends/social-media-guidelines.aspx>

<http://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-fired-2011-5#a-waitress-cant-deal-with-a-bad-tip-1>

5. *What about students whose employers don't have a social media policy, or who are not employed? How can they do this assignment?*

You can offer two options: a) allow the student to choose a second company whose social media policy can be compared to the first; or b) suggest that the student write a social media policy for his company. In the three years I have been giving this assignment, most students take Option B. And many have seen their suggested policies become a working draft for the companies. By doing this assignment and becoming familiar with many different social media policies, they become the expert, which is always a boost to one's career.