

CEO Tip: Social Media – Don't Leave Too Much Up to Chance

by Guido Quelle

What does the CEO have to do with social media? Quite a lot, because when a company has decided it wants to be active in social media, it's a decision that can ultimately only be made by the CEO, as it concerns the company's processes, its organization, and in some cases even its strategy.

But more than that – and that's the focus of this CEO Tip: When a company decides to expand its presence in virtual social networks, it should assume that people will ask its employees about this development. They may even be asked in the context of the social network(s) in question. If so, how should they respond?

The classic: Facebook. Chances are that many of your employees are already signed up for Facebook. What do their accounts look like? What rules have you given them regarding communications involving the company? "Non-disclosure" also and especially applies to the social network.

Taking the idea one step further: What do your employees say when they are asked about their employer – your company – on the net? There are any number of occasions on which this can happen:

- o One of your employees' "friends" was dissatisfied with their shopping experience at one of your retail stores: "Hey, don't you work at ACME, Inc.? I really had a horrible time trying to buy a new coffeemaker there yesterday. They don't have a clue."
- o Another "friend" of another employee wasn't happy with the repair work on his motorcycle: "Do you always have such cutthroats working at your garages? They don't know how to do anything except take people's money."
- o Yet another employee's "friend" applied for a job with your company and received a rejection letter: "Talk about ridiculous! You know I applied at your company. First I get an interviewer who couldn't care less and then had to go through some stupid Assessment Center – totally unfair. And yesterday I got my rejection letter – with no explanation. How can you stand working for these people?"
- o There was a negative article on your company in the newspaper? "I saw your company in the headlines yesterday; not exactly the best publicity ..."
- o Thankfully, the news can't always be bad: "I've heard nothing but good things about your company. I'd like to know more about what you do."

Feel free to add to the list.

Of course you can't and shouldn't interfere in your employees' private lives. But it can certainly help if you succeed in getting your employees to respond professionally when approached about their company. Impressing the need for professionalism upon them is the first step towards establishing a policy on how they talk about the company.

Once you have convinced your staff of the need to think twice before responding to posts that concern your company, you can then sit down together in a small group to discuss typical scenarios (like those mentioned above) and agree upon suitable responses. If you can also put this in a visually appealing form (e.g. posters), you'll succeed in reaching more employees. In this regard, don't limit yourself to logic; feel free to give the design and content a more emotional touch.

Don't leave anything to chance when it comes to how people talk about your company in the virtual world.

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