

A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved top and a white skirt with black and red horizontal stripes, is smiling as she looks at a white tablet device. She is standing in front of a window with a white frame. The background is slightly blurred, showing an office or indoor setting.

Ajilon

The Dos and Don'ts of Social Media

A best practice guide for employees.

A photograph of two women sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop screen. The woman on the left is resting her chin on her hand, and the woman on the right is pointing at the screen. The image has a light blue tint.

Social media is becoming more and more prevalent in our everyday lives. As companies see a rising number of employees using social media platforms on a daily basis, and even during working hours, the need for guidelines has never been more obvious.

While many businesses now implement social media rules, some simply don't even think about it. As a result, there have been numerous high-profile instances of people losing their jobs because of inappropriate, poorly-worded, or offensive social posts.

Whether your employer has set guidelines or not, it's crucial you know what's appropriate to post online. We've compiled a list of dos and don'ts for using social media, showing you how to post safely and responsibly without risking any negative repercussions from your employer.

Whether you're an active tweeter or an occasional Instagrammer, take a look at our advice to ensure you stay on the right side of professional.

DO

1. Familiarize yourself with company policy.

In our modern digital age, employers have a responsibility to create clear and concise social media guidelines for staff members. This is to make sure that nobody wastes company time using their personal social media accounts when they should be working, and that they know exactly where they stand when it comes to what can and cannot be posted online.

Having recently surveyed 2,000 office workers across the US, we discovered that only 6% know that their employer has a social media policy, but have not yet familiarized themselves with it. On the other hand, 19% don't know if there is a policy, and a shocking 26% said that their employer doesn't have one in place at all.

Many firms have developed bespoke social media policies, so check whether or not your employer has one, and if they do, read it thoroughly. This is your opportunity to figure out exactly what is or is not permitted.

2. Scope out the approach to social by colleagues.

Knowing what your HR social media policy states is one thing, but how do other employees in your organisation actually use social? Do they have separate work and personal accounts? Have they friended their managers and colleagues, or is this not the done thing?

Just as you would analyze what other people wear in the office when you're at an interview to figure out what to wear on your first day, take a look at your colleagues' profiles to work out what the general tone is.

Play it safe while you're the new kid: don't post anything too attention-grabbing until you know how this office operates online. Once you've found your feet, you can follow both the written and generally-accepted rules.

3. Clean up your profiles.

Before applying for jobs or having interviews, go through your profiles carefully. Even after you've accepted a job offer- old posts can still come back to haunt you.

Many people neglect to do this: while 16% of people we surveyed check their profiles before interviews, 62% believed they didn't need to. 18-24-year-olds take the most precautions: just under 1 in 4 check their profiles when job-hunting, which still leaves a significant proportion who don't bother.

No one knows this lesson better than Ethan Czahor. Jeb Bush's former chief technology officer resigned in 2015 after old, offensive tweets were unearthed, allegedly written while he was part of improv comedy in 2010.



Czahor turned this into an opportunity to educate others, developing [Clear](#): a software that analyses your social profiles to find anything you might want to remove.

It's easy to retrieve posts that you might not be proud of now, so give your profile a look-over to give recruiters the best impression possible.

4. Keep work and life separate.

To prevent any of your online posts from being seen as a representation of your current employer, it is important to make a clear distinction between your personal opinions and the company you work for.

This could be as simple as writing 'views and opinions are all my own' in your Twitter biography, for example. This way, you can engage in debates or conversations online without being tied to your company reputation.

Of course, this doesn't give you the green flag for saying whatever you like (we'll come to this later), but it does ensure that no one will mistake your personal opinions for company values or attitudes.

5. Post about your company culture.

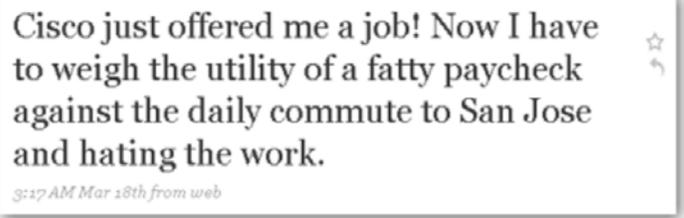
A lot of modern organisations tend to promote their company culture and are proud to give employees an experience that is social as well as professional. This is a selling point in terms of the company's professional social pages. So, for example, if your boss orders pizza for anyone staying late for a big project, taking a snap and sharing it on Instagram can really help to forge the brand's social identity.

Remember to tag your company's account in anything work-related that you post. This will allow the social team to keep an eye on how the business is being portrayed online and gives you the opportunity to act as a brand ambassador.

6. Think carefully before you post anything.

Before you post something online, consider who your words or pictures will be visible to and how they might interpret it. This is especially important if you're writing in frustration: take a step back, and look objectively at the tone of your post and how it could be portrayed to others.

A notable example of this gone wrong has apocryphally become known as the 'Cisco Fatty' tweet. After being offered a job by Cisco, 22-year-old Connor Riley tweeted about whether or not she should take the position:

A screenshot of a tweet from Connor Riley. The text of the tweet is: "Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work." The tweet includes a star icon and a retweet icon on the right side. Below the text, it says "3:17 AM Mar 18th from web".

Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work.

3:17 AM Mar 18th from web

A Cisco associate found her tweet and responded with the suggestion that the hiring manager would love to know Connor's thoughts about the job. Suffice to say, the offer of work was withdrawn.

The lesson to learn from this is to think carefully about the implications of your post, from the content itself to who might be able to read it.

7. Remember: anything you write online is out of your control.

No matter how quickly you delete a post, the damage may already been done by a sneaky screenshot.

Even private messages can be problematic. Anything you commit to writing online and send to someone else is in their hands: they can access and share it as they choose, so never type anything in confidence that would violate your employer's social media policy.

Learn from the mistakes of Justine Sacco, the head of corporate communications at a large company, whose 'ironic' tweet led to international scandal. Before boarding a plane to South Africa, she [tweeted about the dangers of visiting Africa](#), intending it to be read as a 'joke'. Unfortunately for her, not many people read it that way.

While in the air and disconnected from the online tornado she'd created, the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet saw people around the world awaiting her arrival so they could see just how much trouble she was in.

Over those 11 hours, without her knowledge, the Twittersphere was able to tarnish her reputation forever. She was fired the next day.

8. Observe company rules about social media use in working hours.

If employers catch workers habitually spending company time and money checking their Twitter/Facebook feed, there could be serious repercussions.

68% of people we surveyed check social media for personal use each day, and 11% spend over an hour at work every day on social media outside their lunch break. [The average hourly wage in the US](#) is \$25.69, therefore, if an employee wastes one hour each day on social media, this totals \$128.45 per week and \$6,422.50 over a 50-week year.

The largest proportion of our respondents said they only check social media for 5–15 minutes each day, but even this stills adds up to 20–62.5 wasted hours annually – costing \$513.80–\$1,605.63 per employee every year.

Make use of your time in the office effectively, and limit how much company resource you waste on social media.



DON'T

1. Post anything that you wouldn't shout out in public.

Don't write or share anything on social media that you would get into trouble for saying out loud. Make this your mantra for social media usage, and you should avoid any issues with your employer.

Unfortunately, many of the people we asked said that they have previously posted something negative about their work on social media, with 5% admitting to specifically complaining about their boss.

Over half of people are connected with their boss on at least one social media platform, yet a shocking 24% have written something negative about work – something they may well not want their employer to see.

Men are particularly bad for this: 31% have previously published a negative post about work on social media. This kind of reckless posting could be why 13% of men have been in trouble with their employer over their social media usage.

2. Disclose confidential information.

Whether it relates to your company, colleagues, or clients, if it's classed as 'confidential', then you must not publicize it on any social media platform.

Anything from discussing new appointments that are not 100% confirmed yet to pictures of product testing that gives away new developments can result in a meeting with HR.

This may be in direct breach of your contract, and depending on the nature of what you share, you could find yourself facing legal action from your employer or even a client, making this a social faux pas that is really not worth taking the risk.

3. Post anything from the wrong account.

If you're responsible for your company's social accounts, take every precaution to avoid posting from the wrong account.

Logging in every time you post may seem like an extra effort, but we guarantee it would be worse to accidentally send something intended for your personal account from a corporate one.

A particularly awkward instance occurred when Idaho representative Raúl Labrador appeared to tweet his approval of a racy 2 Broke Girls skit during the Super Bowl:



It quickly emerged that his spokesperson, Phil Hardy, had intended to tweet from his own account, instead of Labrador's, and tried to rectify the situation.



Unfortunately, the damage was already done, and Hardy promptly found himself out of a job.

Many apps on cell phones, tablets, and other devices, allow you to switch back and forth between multiple accounts, so if it is your job to represent your brand on social platforms then always double-check which account you are logged into.

4. Take a sick day and then post on social media.

Calling in sick when you're not is pretty naughty anyway, but if you're going to risk it, don't give the game away on social media.

Employers will really resent seeing your "check-in" at the movie theatre or local café when you're supposed to be at home sick, and some may even get irritated if you spend your sick day tweeting, sharing, and posting instead of getting some 'R and R'.

At best they will start to doubt you next time you call in sick. At worst, you could find yourself facing disciplinary action.

5. Identify people by name when speaking negatively.

Whether it's a client, colleague, or manager, calling someone out explicitly can lead to nasty consequences.

Even if your profile is set to 'private', or you customize who can/can't see your posts, anyone who does see it can screenshot it and send on to a new audience. Euphemisms won't help either: it's often easy to identify who's being dragged through the digital mud.

6% of people we asked admitted to writing something negative about a colleague on social media. Even riskier is mentioning clients or customers, which is exactly what 5% of our respondents admitted to have done in the past.

A waiter at Barney Greengrass fell foul of this, ranting on Twitter about actress Jane Adams not tipping:

When Adams found out, she returned to inform the owner... and pay her \$3 tip. [Ingels was subsequently fired.](#)



No matter how frustrated you are, never put your company's reputation at stake for the sake of a quick complaint online.

6. Post anything offensive.

What you do off the clock is largely your own prerogative, so being reprimanded for something unrelated to work that you posted on Saturday morning is not necessarily expected.

However, this depends on what you say and what kind of job you do. If your work involves a duty of care, and on weekends you're posting abusive terminology online, then your boss could justifiably have something to say about it.

A firefighter and paramedic from Bourne, MA, was [fired in 2011](#) because of his tweets. Richard Doherty used offensive slurs against a range of people: the LGBT community, those with mental illnesses, and anyone whose political views he disagreed with.

Chances are, your employee handbook prohibits offensive behaviour anyway, so don't assume that this doesn't extend to social media.

If your sector involves dealing with sensitive issues or performing a public service, then think carefully about the language you use in your 'downtime'.

7. Share any information that is not yours to share.

Promotions, resignations, restructures... if you are not the person in charge of the company (or, at least, the company's social presence), then it is not your call as to whether or not a piece of information goes live.

Furthermore, if one of your colleagues has news regarding their specific job role, no matter how well you know them, it is not your place to be broadcasting this on social media. You wouldn't want your own news to be announced by someone else, so never do it to any of your co-workers. This may not result in disciplinary action necessarily, but it may create tension at work that needn't be there at all.

Using social media doesn't have to cause you problems at work. Follow our advice, and you can stay on your boss's good side while maintaining your own personality online.

Got any other tips for staying professional online? Let us know on Twitter [@ajilon](https://twitter.com/ajilon).

