

Creating an effective social media policy

43% of seafarers now have access to broadband at sea¹ and many more have mobile phones with data connections when close to land. Away from family and friends for extended periods, seafarers are active on social platforms ranging from the mainstream Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms, to the less well known, such as Path, CrewToo, and even online dating sites.

In this context, a social media policy is an essential document for both seafarers and shore staff, but unfortunately many social media policies are so ineffective as to be virtually useless. Social media policies are notoriously difficult to enforce because it is nearly impossible (and potentially illegal) to monitor the full extent of an employee's online activity.

Successful social media policies must be simple, inclusive and they must win the support of those they are intended to guide.

Every company has a unique set of priorities and employment structures so there is no single generic policy that will work for all; however, when developing a policy there are some important do's and don'ts.

Do

- Keep the policy short – less than a page. Longer policies probably won't be read and are therefore largely worthless.
- Make a memorable presentation of the policy (e.g. at a seastaff conference). Policies, especially social media policies, are easily ignored because people wrongly assume they already know what they say.
- Include the rationale for policy points which may not be obvious; people are much more likely to follow guidance when they understand the 'why?'
- Highlight the importance of distinguishing personal positions from company positions. For example, your employees can post pictures of themselves on their own pages at political rallies, but they should not have the company logo on their shirt.
- Include guidance about discrimination and hate speech, especially pertaining to racial, sexual, religious and other slurs.
- Highlight issues of confidentiality, sensitive information and breaking news – employees should never share this kind of information via social media.
- Encourage employees to be your eyes and ears online. They should alert the communications team to any posts they think might be problematic for the company.

¹ www.futurenavitics.com/crewconn15

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- Ensure that it is clear where employees should redirect any questions they might receive from journalists online.

Don't

- Try to overly restrict social media access. No matter what you do, seafarers are going to use social media and any attempt to forbid access will only motivate employees to hide their activity (e.g. us aliases) which will make it even more difficult to monitor.
- Assume that your policy will be absolutely followed. It is highly likely that the policy will be breached and you should have monitoring systems in place to increase the chances of correcting any problematic posts.
- Make threats. The policy should provide guidance and education rather than threats of termination or prosecution.
- Write in technical or legal language. Such language is a contrast with the positive, open and inclusive approach you should aim for. Further, it may be difficult for some non-Native-English-speakers to understand.

If you're reviewing your existing policy or looking to create one, please don't hesitate to contact us. We'd be happy to provide advice and some examples of what has worked for other companies. operations@navigatorresponse.com

