

HR

By Lauren Moore



BE SMART about Social Media

The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, which has been studying online adults' social networking site use since 2005, found that last year, 73 percent of adults that are online are using social networking sites. Like it or not, your customers – and your employees – are using social media, probably on a daily basis. It's crucial, then, that you consider implementing a social media policy for your funeral home.

At first, banning social media use at work might seem like the easiest solution, but Kelly Baltzell, CEO of Beyond Indigo Funerals, which builds websites and offers marketing solutions, thinks this creates an “us-versus-them” scenario, rather than encouraging employees to use their common sense. “Everyone wants to be trusted,” she said. “Use that angle rather than being authoritative. Ditch the fear, and embrace new ideas.” Besides, she added, “People are not going to stop

using it. They're just going to go to the bathroom and text. If you try to squash it, they're going to use it anyway.”

Managers might be afraid that if employees are given the green light to use social media at work, they will just sit on Facebook or play games all day, but Baltzell pointed out that's now how people use social media. “Lots of businesses get authoritative because they don't know about social media,” she explained. “I would encourage managers to educate themselves about the

power of social media.”

Prohibiting employees from using social media during work hours may actually be a disservice to your customers. “Most consumers and customers have become accustomed to receiving customer service real-time on Twitter, Facebook and such. The consumers at large are not only comfortable with this kind of interaction with a company, they also expect it,” said Mayra Ruiz-McPherson, founder of Ruiz-McPherson Communications, a marketing and public relations firm. “If you shut that off completely, it's almost like you're blocking the natural opportunities that may present organically to connect with families, loved ones, vendors, etc., who, with or without you, are already out there.”

Using social media at work – as long as it's done properly – has its advantages. “Fresh, relevant and timely information on social media can make a

social strategy work very well, and allowing staff to contribute to social sites during work hours opens a lot of really great doors,” said Ashley Montroy, marketing and social media manager for FrontRunner Professional.

Since a blanket ban on social media use is probably not in the best interest of your funeral home, employees or customers, it’s important to establish a concrete social media policy for employees, and to avoid falling into the trap of thinking that your funeral home does not need one.

“It is so important for funeral homes to develop a social media policy, because with the Internet, it is not just about what a funeral home’s social media accounts are talking about,” Montroy said. “Anyone, anywhere can talk about the business they work for. A social media policy empowers employees while keeping them accountable. A policy also helps a business stay on track with its targeted business goals and puts a plan in place when something does happen online.”

Social Media at Work*

Top three social media sites accessed at work



70% of adults use Twitter at work

65% use Facebook

51% use LinkedIn

* According to a survey of more than 1,100 employees in North America conducted by SilkRoad Technologies, a social talent management software company.

Ruiz-McPherson has some recommendations when it comes to establishing a social media policy. “This is not a policy about how often you need to clean out the fridge. This policy requires that legal counsel review it,” she said. “Once you have defined internally what works for you, for the company brand, it absolutely needs to be reviewed by legal counsel.”

Baltzell agrees that consulting with a lawyer is crucial. Beyond Indigo Funerals has a social media policy funeral

homes can purchase and use either in full or as a template, and a lawyer specializing in employment law has reviewed it. “I would always highly recommend that a funeral home consult with an employee lawyer,” Baltzell said, even if managers were to use an already-established policy, such as Beyond Indigo’s, as a template. “If the policy is not written correctly, and it isn’t done right, if there’s a huge employee transgression, the funeral home may not have any legal basis to

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terminate the employee,” she said. “Then if they do fire the employee, the employee can sue. It’s an important thing to have, but it should be done correctly.” Although a solid social media policy needs to be legally binding, it shouldn’t have to read like a law book, according to Ryan Thogmartin, founder and CEO of DISRUPT Media, a social media agency. “A social media policy should be easy to understand,”

he said. “It needs to be designed to address what you want employees to do on social media. It needs to empower, not restrict.”

An ideal social media policy should outline what an employer expects from his or her employees online. “At the end of the day, you cannot control what your staff does online per-se, but you can outline the rules for being employed by the funeral home in terms

of online interaction,” Montroy said. The policy should encourage funeral home staff to participate while including information about using common sense, and when and how they can use social media from the funeral home, she added.

The policy should also cover how the funeral home should be portrayed online. “There should be a very clear definition of how you discuss or engage your brand on the Internet, and that should go across all platforms,” Baltzell said. Hot-button topics such as religion or politics should not be discussed.

When it comes to personal social media use, Thogmartin suggests creating a separate document he calls “Rules of the Road,” because the word “policy” sounds too restrictive and an employer can’t legally limit a person’s right to free speech. “A ‘Rules of the Road’ document is more along the lines of common sense guidelines,” he explained. For example, suggest that if the employee wouldn’t do something at work, then he or she should probably not do it online.

Baltzell suggests explaining to employees how negative criticism or complaining about a job on the Internet can have an impact not just on the funeral home but on the surrounding community. “A funeral home is part of the fabric of a community, so discuss how that affects the funeral home as part of the community. It’s best to explain why versus saying, ‘Just don’t do it.’ Talk about how this sort of thing can ripple across the community, especially in smaller towns,” she said. “What employers don’t want to do is get an employee who had a bad day at work go on their own Facebook page and gripe about work, because that hurts their brand. There’s a place to vent. We understand everyone has a bad day at work, but let’s discuss where to have those conversations and how to express that.”

Social media policies should also address how to handle negative commentary coming from consumers. “It should cover protocol and procedures, how to respond to those negative reviews, because those are the first that aggravate or really concern business

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owners,” Ruiz-McPherson said. “Once you get past that particular scenario, there’s also compliments, customer service inquiries that have to be governed and managed, as well as how your funeral home is engaging with these families and vendors, and how that data is being consumed or collected by staff and how you’re following through.” In other words, policies should cover, start to finish, any engagement that may occur on branded social media channels, and how one should proceed in any scenario.

While having a social media policy in writing is important, Ruiz-McPherson believes managers need to do more.

“How many times have employees come and gone with an organization and not cracked open an employee handbook?” she asked. “Your policy is there, but you can’t assume the employees are reading it.” She suggests holding quarterly or semiannual training. This is also helpful, as social media is always evolving. “It’s essential to keep up with the trends and factors that impact change.” It also presents the opportunity for organizations to refine and adjust social media policies accordingly. “Employees will have feedback and questions. This will be a living, breathing document that will need refinement and tweaking over

time,” Ruiz-McPherson said.

If your funeral home doesn’t have a social media policy in place, you might want to consider putting one together soon. “With funeral homes, the social matter is delicate and emotional,” Ruiz-McPherson pointed out. “It’s important to have a policy in place. As an employer or business owner, you cannot assume employees will always know how to act or behave under certain conditions. To avoid assumptions, potential misunderstandings and commentary that would not be considered, under a company’s brand, appropriate or suitable, policies are necessary to help define that framework.” •



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