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## Important Characteristics of An Effective Social Media Policy

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How do you protect our reputation, your employees, and your clients from the risk of social media? As a financial institution, how do you protect your reputation, and most importantly your stakeholders?

This white paper will take you through the important aspects that should be followed to protect your organization. We recommend the Coca Cola model of social media. The five steps are listed below. Coca Cola, a Fortune 100 company, has developed a great model for social media protection. It goes well beyond a policy, it makes sure that everyone is focused on the same objective.

This whitepaper is not designed to show you how to market or use social media tools to enhance your brand image. There are many resources focused on that end. There, unfortunately, are very few that are designed to protect you and your organization with a management perspective toward harnessing the risk of social media. As with all swords, social media cuts both ways. It can be a tool to help build your brand or harm your reputation. Like any weapon, it must be handled with care. Training and practice will bring you to a better understanding of how to use it for gain and protection.

In this whitepaper you will learn:

- 1) The key elements of an effective social media policy.
- 2) The purpose behind an employee agreement and whether you should ask your employees to sign one.
- 3) How to appropriately train employees on the risks and hazards of social media interaction, along with how social media can impact their career and the organization as a whole.
- 4) What your management team needs to know about social media, and how to monitor employees to ensure reputation protection.
- 5) Reasons for testing employee competency on your social media policy.

The rising blood pressure of company lawyers, human resource directors and corporate communication departments is understandable. Never before have as many employees had the ability to “publish” their personal and business thoughts as publicly, quickly, or with as little effort.

With corporate guidelines for social media, companies are trying to find the middle ground between fostering open employee-generated dialogue and gaffes that erode the

corporate image—or worse. This white paper provides an examination of social media guidelines so that you can effectively harness the power of this new technology without driving your employees—or your lawyer—crazy.



## **Key Elements of an Effective Social Media Policy**

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Here is a list of the important ideas to think about as you put together a social media policy. Each area needs to be addressed in your social media solution. You need employee education, an attitude of respect online, adherence to laws, and to encourage transparency.

**Educational Element:** For many employees, social media is a relatively new phenomenon. However, regardless of their private experience with social media sites, the creation of an organization's social media site deserves specific training efforts. Think for a minute about your latest technology upgrade. It cost you money. Sometimes a lot of money. After you created it, did you simply walk away, confident that employees would eventually understand the new process? Of course not. Instead, you spent time making sure they knew every detail. You trained them. The same is true with an effective social media policy. It contains some training element that ensures your employees know how to set up the sites, and how to interact with the public.

**Respect:** Your social media policy should contain respect for the public. It should encourage your employees to go above and beyond to ensure everyone visiting your sites feel comfortable. By creating this kind of atmosphere, consumers are drawn to the interactions and conversations that you start. Obviously you want people to be attracted to your sites. An atmosphere of respect is a surefire way to achieve this.

**Abide and adhere to laws:** Take the time to, in writing, state that you adhere to all laws and regulations. This ensures consumer privacy is upheld as a primary concern. The ultimate goal of a social media policy is to guide employees as they navigate social media sites. By putting this clause in your policy, you ensure employees understand that laws override and guide all decisions and behavior.

**Encourage transparency:** Transparency is a word often attached to any social media operation. However, for your organization, it is crucial. You *must* develop a working, transparent relationship on your sites. People on social media sites are on the lookout for companies not being honest. What's more, when you're discovered (because they will find out), it spreads faster than ever before. Thus, in order to ensure your social media interactions are successful, you need to hold a transparent relationship. Integrity is the key.

**Q & A Section:** A good social media policy will address concerns from employees before they are asked. Being brand new, your policy is full of ideas, concepts, and terms they may have never heard. Be proactive and explain these up front to ensure your employees understand what you're talking about.

**Readable:** Although your policy will use terms that employees might be unfamiliar with, don't riddle the policy with verbose and legal language. The idea here is to develop something that is understood, embraced, and put into practice. If the reading requires a lawyer, employees shuffle it to the bottom of their stack of the endless pile of paper.

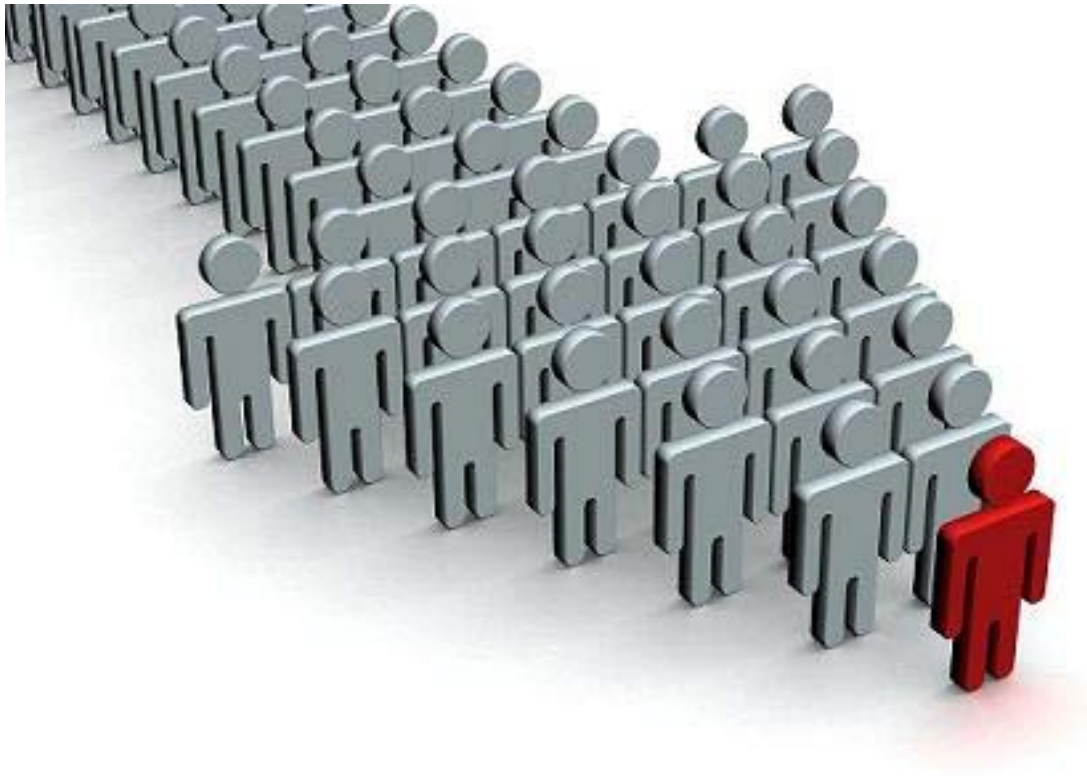
**Concise:** A policy doesn't need to be fifty pages. This lies along the same lines as the verbose language. First and foremost, a fifty page document will not be read by staff. Second, a lengthy document stifles the creativity that you are trying to encourage. Remember, the goal isn't to place so many limits on the process that you prevent people from being innovative. In fact, the goal is just the opposite. Your social media policy should be designed to guide an employee away from missteps in the process. Guide, don't control. Recent research discovered the average length is 500-2,000 words in length.<sup>1</sup>

**Expectations:** Following that logic, your organization needs to develop clear expectations as to what your employees can do. Your expectations should be clear and not attempt to define absolutes. In the ever-changing world of social media, you cannot possibly hope to create a policy that defines absolutes *and* stays relevant. That kind of logic is irresponsible and misguided. Instead, help employees understand the logic in being responsible and reap the benefits.

**Link:** A social media policy should enable an employee to find all the information that they need to make educated decisions. Where possible, link content areas to other policy books for further reference. You can also place information into the policy that allows an employee to have access to individuals in charge of areas of interest. This could include your press release contact, webmaster, or even your graphic design department.

**Stay Positive:** Instead of telling your employees what they cannot do, give guidelines for what they can do. This positive spin is not new to human resources, and encourages your employees to walk away from the policy with a positive mindset, instead of one shut down by endless negatively worded rules.

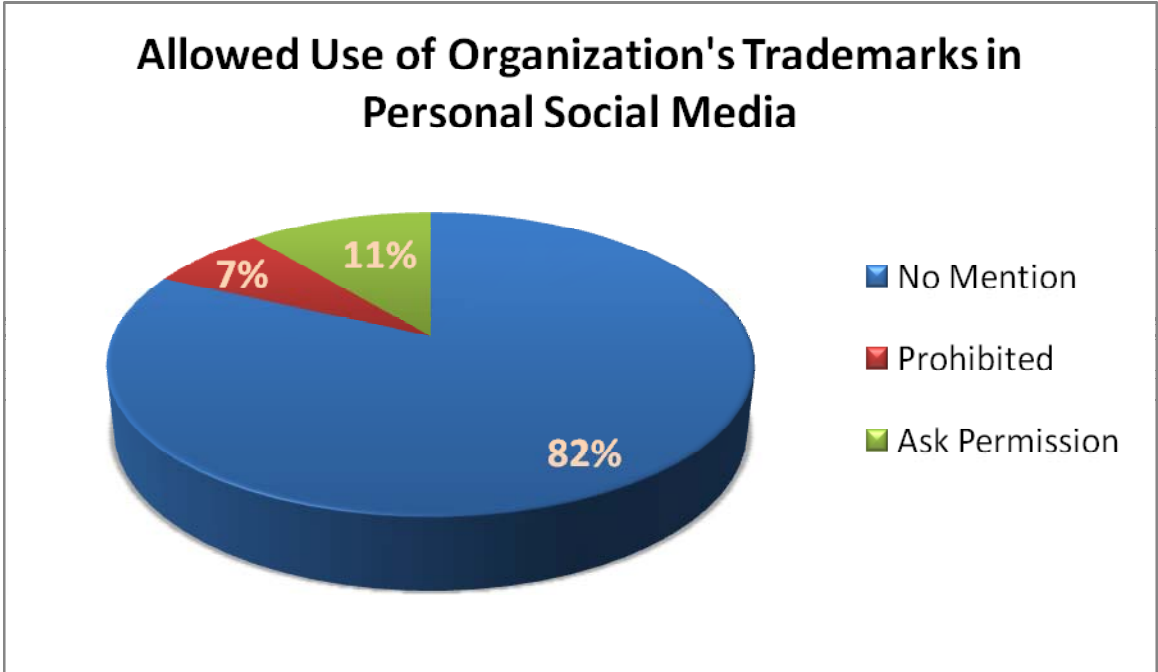
**Collaborate:** Collaboration is perhaps one of the best ways to ensure you stay on the leading edge of social media. This includes collaboration with consumers, other employees, and even competition. As you build a better product for your consumers, listen, collaborate, and deliver. A recent Harvard Business Review article states that, as a result, these companies are seeing improvements in communication, cross-functional collaboration and creative approaches to problem solving.<sup>ii</sup>



# Important Aspects Of An Employee/Organization Agreement

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**Logo Design:** Make sure your agreement explains the use of trademarks in personal use. In a survey of 47 social media policies, the following data was collected:



This data shows one major conclusion: current social media policies are ineffective in addressing the pressing issues they are designed to correct. That is, your social media policy needs to include such areas as personal trademark use.

**Confidential Information:** Ensure there is a section in your agreement with regards to releasing not yet public information and trade secrets. Apple has had several incidents where information was leaked early. Don't be victim to this occurrence without it outlined in your agreement. Make sure that consumer information is protected, i.e. account numbers, account information, or consumers' names.

**Disclosure:** Require employees to disclose their affiliation to the organization if they are commenting on an issue or area with which they are connected. This plays back to the transparency of the organization. By sending this crucial message, you maintain your trust in the social realm.

**Take Ownership:** If identifying themselves as an employee, referring to the company, or linking to it, require the employee to take ownership and state that their views and opinions are not necessarily those of the organization.



## Scary And Humorous Employee Nightmares

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Like any new format, employees are on the front line of discovering what is right and wrong. Take the following example from 2009: Honda created a new concept car called the Crosstour. The concept design received a lot of negative comments, with over half asking for the car to be burned on the spot. Enter Eddie. Like a galant knight, Eddie swoops in with a positive comment, aimed at dispelling the naysayers on the wall. A short exchange is below:



**Eddie Okubo** Interesting design. I would get this car in a heartbeat. I may be the older crowd with my kids out of the house and still need some space and performance. Don't need anything big.

8 minutes ago · Report



**John Wilk** sounds like you are trying to save your job at Honda ?

6 minutes ago · Report



**Akitomo Sugawara** Maybe you like it Eddie because you're the MANAGER OF PRODUCT PLANNING at Honda (light trucks in particular)? Lol!

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/eddie-okubo/14/8a3/4b4>

[http://www.trucktrend.com/features/consumer/163\\_0901\\_truck\\_trends\\_2009\\_power\\_list/photo\\_09.html](http://www.trucktrend.com/features/consumer/163_0901_truck_trends_2009_power_list/photo_09.html)  
about a minute ago · Report

iv

The first thing to notice here is the time stamp. In two minutes, someone had questioned Eddie's affiliation to Honda. In 7 minutes, someone had figured out he was the product planning manager, a photo listing him in his position, and his LinkedIn account. As the common saying dictates, "the dangers of social media are that people actually read what you write." This rings incredible true for Eddie and his choice to praise his company's product.

Honda removed the post, citing two reasons: 1) He did not first state that he is a Honda employee and that his posting is his personal—not Honda's—opinion. 2) He is not a spokesperson for Honda.

### A corporate mistake not to be repeated:

Another powerful example comes from Whole Foods Inc. Since about 1999, a character by the name of Rahodeb posted on Yahoo Finance's stock-market message boards cheering the financial results of Whole Foods and bashing Wild Oats' (a fierce competitor). "Would Whole Foods buy OATS?" Rahodeb questioned. "Almost surely not at current prices. What would they gain? OATS locations are too small." Later, Rahodeb commented that Wild Oats management, "clearly doesn't know what it is

doing...OATS has no value and no future.” Typical comments for a stock forum. The source, unfortunately for Whole Foods, was anything but.

In a document by the Federal Trade Commission, Rahodeb is an anagram of the name Deborah, John Mackey’s—co-founder and chief executive of Whole Foods Market Inc.—wife. Rahodeb even defended a recent haircut by Mr. Mackey when another person commented on how funny he looked in the annual report’s photo. “I like Mackey’s haircut,” Rahodeb said. “I think he looks cute!”<sup>v</sup>

Management should have never used a public forum to promote their insider perspective views. This lacked transparency, honesty and integrity. Don’t fall victim to this type of behavior. Protect your institution with training, and clear examples of what not to do.

### **Tweets sound so sweet, except when you use it to sell furniture:**

The last incredible example provided is a bit of hashtag spam. On twitter, hashtagging is a keyword added to the information you tweeted to help narrow down what information you want to search for on Twitter. It is a great way to search for a topic you are interested in without having to follow every single person that is tweeting about it. The Iranian election (hashtagged as #Iraelection) was the first viral form of this search capability. But one company tried to take advantage of it.

Habitat is a major furniture brand in the United Kingdom. As such, they wanted to ensure that their marketing efforts were targeted to the young, hip crowd that their furniture is marketed toward. Knowing how stiff competition is these days, Habitat created the Twitter account “HabitatUK” and started tweeting.

Although it sounds harmless, it was Habitat’s poor etiquette (and judgment) that got it into trouble. After it would post a promotional message, it would hashtag the tweet with the most popular hashtag of the day, namely the Iranian election. Thus, “save big money on this new couch” would be displayed every time someone would search for #Iraelection.

After a viral firestorm, the upscale furniture company removed the offending tweets. See a few of the comments below:



[stuartgibson](#): Well, [@HabitatUK](#) has managed to lose the respect I had for them. Way to screw up your social media credentials with the hipsters.

2 days ago from [Tweetie](#) · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)



[szlwz](#): [#iranelection](#) love [@habitatuk](#) and their use of hashtags [#iphone](#)

2 days ago from [TwitterBerry](#) · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)



[roryoconnor](#): RT [@cimota](#): RT [@prendio2](#): well [@HabitatUK](#) is official case study in how not to use twitter... you guys a a freakin disaster [OMG!!]

2 days ago from [TweetDeck](#) · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)



[mattfarrugia](#): [@cimota](#) Its hard not to label [@HabitatUK](#) as a spam-bot. Terrible thing to do to a premium brand.

2 days ago from [Tweetie](#) · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)



[cimota](#): RT [@prendio2](#): well [@HabitatUK](#) is official case study in how not to use twitter... you guys a a freakin disaster

2 days ago from [Tweetie](#) · [Reply](#) · [View Tweet](#)

Blogger Tiphereth commented on Social Media Today, that fouling out with a few social media etiquette mistakes is alright. She goes on to say it is okay to fail. “Do it quickly and apologize publicly. People are a lot more forgiving when you admit your mistakes rather than denying any wrongdoing.”<sup>vi</sup>

There is a multitude of ways that an organization can be faced with social media nightmares. They are too numerous to count. But employees and managers need to be trained on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable when using social media to ensure that the damage is minimized.

## Training For Management

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Your management team *needs* to be versed on all facets of the social media world. Without proper training, your management team will not be able to train employees. Several tips include the following:

**Social Media Etiquette** This is truly an area of training where we suggest hiring a social media solution expert to ensure you receive the most up-to-date and timely information. However, in this section, we'll briefly describe some of the larger faux pas:

Hashtags: Twitter utilizes these to streamline searching. As explained in the nightmares section, it enables you to search for something without having to follow the people tweeting about it. It is created by using the pound symbol (#) and the name. Ex. #FollowFriday. Follow Friday is common place on Twitter. Every Friday, people tweet a special tweet with names of people they suggest you follow. At the end, #FF or #FollowFriday is typed.

Groups v. Fan Pages: Facebook recently created fan pages when they realized groups just didn't cut it anymore. Unlike a group, a fan page is designed almost like a mini Facebook profile, and is created for a celebrity or organization. Your organization, for example. Groups, however, are more for causes or small private groups. An example here would be the employees of your organization. This isn't a fan based need, it's a group.

Build relationships: Your goal should be to reach out and start conversations with your consumers. Always attempt to build a relationship—for a lifetime—never short term gains. Social media is a great way to ensure you either sink or swim. By building a lasting relationship, you'll swim farther. In fact, when in trouble (even by a rogue complainer) the relationships you've built will undoubtedly back up your every move.

Listen: This sounds simple, but far too often, it's not implemented. As a *member* of your social community, you need to listen to the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of those around you. By simply taking the time to listen, a majority of your problems will disappear. Everyone loves a listener, and this doesn't end when we move into social media.

Be human: Remember that social media sites are full of real people, not machines. So don't be one. A perfect example is a college that posts updates for each of their press releases. The only problem is that they only update their posts once a week. So instead of timely information throughout the week, you get dumped with ten reports on Friday at 5pm. That isn't human.

Don't spew: I have yet to meet someone who enjoys marketers who spew information via social media platforms. Instead, listen, be human, build relationships, and converse with people. Spewing marketing slogans or links to sign up for programs (FREE!) does nothing but turn people off from the real value you have to add to a social media site.

**Who Officially Speaks** You should have designated official social media spokespeople. These individuals, having gone through more training than other employees, make it their job to create, monitor, and converse with consumers via the many social media facets you maintain.

**When Something Goes Wrong** It will happen. An employee will make a decision, and someone will use social media to complain about the decision. That puts an institution at a disadvantage. You may not be able to speak about specifics while the unhappy consumer continues to spew complaint after complaint in the very public social media arena. Your first line of defense is having an official social media spokesperson. Only allow them to respond to the negative comments online. Make sure employees know not to get involved. Allow the spokesperson to reach out to the upset individual and help resolve the situation.

A great reason to monitor social media sites and have a spokesperson respond is the following tale:

A woman called a company's call center to fix a problem. After hanging up, she felt as though she needed further resolution. Not getting the fix she hoped for with the phone call, she vented on a social media site. A company representative found the complaint and contacted her to see if he could solve the problem. Within a mere ten minutes, the problem was fixed. The representative asked the woman if she would mind posting that her problem had been fixed. Her glowing summary of the resolution was capped with the statement, "The recovery was better than getting it right the first time."

## Employee Training

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Your social media policy training needs to be developed before it is implemented. Time and time again, organizations take the time to organize focus groups to develop a quality product, only to fall short on the training of employees. Social media is not immune to this lapse either.

Let's say you took the time to develop a quality policy through a consultant and focus groups. Your board has bought into the project, management understands it, and you stop. What does this accomplish? Who is on the front lines, the focal point of your organization each day? That's right, your employees! Guess who you forgot to train on the policy. Yep, the same people.

Through the creation of a social media policy, you are able to create a practical guide that should enable employees to better understand their social media interactions and purpose. Naturally, it should be designed in such a way that employees *want* to learn about it and better themselves. Remember, this is designed to be a policy that protects not just the organization, but your employees and those you serve.



Above is part of the social media training offered by Telstra. The interactive videos feature what Telstra calls the 3R's: representation, responsibility, respect.

## Potential Security Risks You Must Know

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### **Mikeyy Worm**

Although not a malicious worm, Mikeyy highlighted a gap in Twitter's code that enabled a worm to post messages such as, "Dude! Mikeyy! Seriously? Haha. ;)" on feeds. To contract the virus, all a user needed to do was view an infected profile. Twitter scurried to prevent the worm from growing and assured users they had prevented any data loss. The event did teach tweeters that security gaps do exist within the popular networking program.

### **Koobface**

The best known of the social networking virus, it appeared on Myspace, Facebook, LinkedIn, Bebo, and Twitter.

The program is used by cybercriminals and enables them to steal private and sensitive data from users. The program sends emails or messages to "friends" of the infected person, getting other users to download the Trojan from a website.

The problem with this virus is that since it comes from friends, users are more likely to download the file. Always make sure you only download files you are expecting or you contact the sender and make sure they sent you the file.

According to a recent report, last year 57% of users report they have been spammed via social networking sites. This is an increase of 70.6% compared to last year. 36% of users claim they've been sent malware via social networking sites, which is a rise of 69.8% from last year.<sup>vii</sup>

## How To Protect Yourself From Social Media Risks

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**Don't be lazy** The best suggestion to safeguard yourself on social media sites is to make each of your passwords unique. Society has hit a point where ease and convenience of one password for all sites has reduced our ability to safeguard against malicious attacks. Just think, if someone gets access to your Twitter login, and all your passwords are the same, this gives them access to your email, your banking, and even your credit card accounts.

**Careful what you click** As requests come pouring into your accounts, it often becomes natural to click on these without even thinking. However, malware creators aren't stupid. They create requests that look like they are from your friends, and after clicking on them, the virus infects your computer.

**Limit contacts** Younger Facebook and some LinkedIn users are obsessed with the number of "friends" or "connections" they have. Surely there can't be any danger to this. Wrong. By adding so many people you don't know, you leave yourself open to having added a scam artists, or a user with malicious intent. A San Francisco based network and security architect/engineer—Jatinder Thukral—states, "I'd rather have 50 relevant contacts than 500 unknowns."<sup>viii</sup>



## Turnkey Solution

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Does all of this information appear overwhelming?

Do you wish there was a simple avenue your organization could take, ensuring the creation of an effective social media policy, employee training, and testing?

Rowland Consulting is proud to provide a new “Social Media Solution” that does just that!

A recent survey conducted by EvalsRus.com revealed that 74% of financial institutions surveyed did not have a satisfactory social media policy, ensuring protection for their organization, employees, and most importantly, their consumers. 81% surveyed didn't have an organization Facebook page, while 98% lacked a Wikipedia page.

With the Social Media Solution you get:

- A ready to use social media policy.
- An employee responsibility agreement—which your employees sign. This clearly outlines the “thou shall not” of social media to protect your consumers' privacy, and your organization's reputation.
- Competency training test for employees—Employees take the quiz to show they understand the organization's social media agreement. It is online and accessible over the internet. Get real scores to show your employees understand what they signed. They can take the test until they pass and it has real life scenarios of what should and should not be done, which corresponds to the employee agreement.
- Management training—the management team will be taught what to look for to protect your organization, how to coach employees about social media, and the “shall and shall not's of social media.” Managers will learn how to protect your organization's reputation with the use of social media.
- Employee training—what they can and can't do with social media. One breach of confidential information, one security lapse, and it could damage the reputation of your organization.

Be current with a Fortune 100 company With more than just a social media policy, Coca Cola has an employee agreement, management and employee training, and they clearly outline who can officially represent the organization. With this turnkey solution, you can mirror, match, and model their strategy that goes beyond just a policy. Contact us today to schedule your preferred date on our rapidly filling calendar!

## How to Get Started, Today!

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Rowland Consulting can do it all for you, all 5 steps of the process for your employees.

The price is \$35.00 per employee, with discounts of 100 employees or more.

Just send me an email at [RoryRRowland@ATT.net](mailto:RoryRRowland@ATT.net) or call me at 816-478-3249 and we can get the process started for your organization.

## Only the Beginning

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Social media policies are something every organization needs to develop as it transitions into the future. As technology continues to advance, organizations must safeguard themselves, their employees, and their consumers from a rapidly changing world. A social media policy is a great first step.

This whitepaper has addressed the important characteristics of an effective policy and employee/organization agreement. You read some of the many nightmares, ideas for management and employee training, and the security risks and protection strategies. Finally, you learned about the Social Media Solution, which ensures your organization stays on the leading edge of policy creation and implementation.

The final thought we would like to offer is with regards to hiring new employees and their previous social media interactions.

The greatest advice that can be offered is to consistently monitor social media sites to attract the best people in the industry. LinkedIn is a great resource to view experts in your field. As you develop a plan for hiring new workers, ensure that viewing candidates' social media sites is a logical step on your track to hiring the best employee.

Taking to heart these ideas and concepts will propel your organization through turbulent times. And the bright side is you're not alone. Rowland Consulting, utilizing its vast expertise and experience, has done all the work in developing these concepts—and many more!

There is no doubt that if applied correctly, your organization can achieve the level of greatness that has made it unique. And together, with Rowland Consulting, we can only achieve more.

## About Us

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Rory Rowland is the president and founder of Rowland Consulting in Independence, Missouri dedicated primarily to helping organizations and leaders to reach their full potential. As a trend watcher, he can help organizations analyze industry trends and use that information to make strategic decisions that will help the organization move forward. Rory studies the top 100 financial institutions across the United States, to determine who is the best at lending, e-services, non-interest income, and sales. Rory is one of the most popular speakers at state and national conferences and has spoken before thousands during his 16-year career. He is also the author of three books: *My Best Boss Ever*, *My Best Service Ever*, and *Think Huge*

Rory conducts and facilitates strategic planning, leadership, lending, management development, marketing, and sales culture development training for state and national associations. He has spoken in all 50 states as well as Canada and Mexico. Rory has an MBA and a BS Degree in Economics. He offers the following services:

**Service Selling Training**—Rory can facilitate your first stages of the process, or help you improve your current sales culture process. He offers programs from 90 minutes to several days to help organizations implement a service selling culture.

**Service Selling Facilitation**—Rory can help you with your board, management team and key stakeholders determine the right approach to your service selling culture. Rory can help the organization design and outline a game plan to implement, track the service selling process.

**Strategic Planning**—Rory has facilitated hundreds of planning sessions over the last 20 years. His experience and knowledge of financial institutions makes him a sought after facilitator. This last year Rory facilitated 25 planning sessions in the fall season alone. Book Rory early so you can get the most favorable time frame.

**On-site Training**—Rory has presented his fun, humorous and high-energy program in all 50 states over the last 20 years. Rory is one of the most popular speakers at state and national conferences, often receiving the highest ratings of any the speakers at the conference. Call Rory to schedule a fun, high-energy program for your employees.

**CEO Compensation Review**—Rory has helped many boards review the salary, bonus, and long-term incentive plans of CEOs. Rory can help you install a 457f plan or a 457b plan for your CEO as well as negotiate and structure a bonus plan for your CEO. Rory can also help you with your CEO bonus plan, Rory says, “Reward what you measure.”

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## Endnotes

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