

Most employers have realized they should have internet use policies for their employees, but those policies should now be updated to address the [Web 2.0](#) and social media. The internet is rapidly being changed by the proliferation of interactive communication tools and websites. When employees use internet social media, the line between workplace conduct and personal conduct can be blurred. Wise employers should give their employees guidance about using these methods of communication.

A sound policy should include the following:

A definition of social media for the purpose of understanding the policy. I like [the definition of social media used by Intel](#)

in its policy: "blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds, or any other kind of social media both on and off intel.com."

Acknowledgment that employees will use the Web 2.0. Employers should not try to prevent employees from using the internet. Instead, employers should educate employees about improper use and how to avoid it.

Acknowledgment that the employer recognizes that employees have the right to spend their personal time as they choose. A good handbook not only guides employee conduct but also fosters a positive corporate culture. Every employee wants to know that the employer respects personal boundaries.

A warning that the employer has the right to manage its public image created by its employees. This warning should be juxtaposed against the employees' right to choose how they use their personal time. Here is where the employer is clarifying the otherwise blurred line between personal time and employer time that occurs when employees are using social media for what the employee believes to be personal use.

A warning that employees who use Web 2.0 sites and tools are creating a public image of themselves and – by extension – their employer.

Examples of web publishing that will be deemed as creating an unacceptable public image for the employer. These examples likely will include descriptions of inappropriate photographs and text.

Advice about how employees who want to use social media for personal purposes can use the sites and tools while insulating the employer from any image being created by the employee's personal use. This advice should provide reference to the most popular sites like MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. One example of how an employee can insulate the employer from the employee's online image is that the employee can create multiple accounts to segregate personal information from public information, and then limit access to and dissemination of the personal information. The policy should warn the employees that when they make their personal information public, the information is no longer personal and private. Advice about using Web 2.0 also should include how to use blogs responsibly. Warn employees that they are not free to create blogs or comments that will do harm to the employer's business and reputation.

A warning that the employer's reputation and image can be harmed directly or indirectly by what the employee publishes on the Web 2.0. Examples of indirect harm being caused are when an employee publishes personal pictures of the employee in unprofessional settings; or the employee writes unprofessional opinions or stories.

A warning about the consequences of choosing to make unprofessional or otherwise harmful publications on the internet. Assuming that employees are employed at will, they should be reminded of it. If not, the policy should explain how a violation provides cause for termination. In any event, the policy should specify and reserve to the employer the right to impose appropriate discipline up to and including termination for violations of the policy.