

5 Steps to Effectively Managing Social Media Risk



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Is your organization among the 97% of nonprofits in the US that use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media as a key part of your communications and development efforts? If so, you should be thinking about how best to protect your organization from any number of risks that are unique to social networks. Here are 5 steps to help you get started:

1. **Get—and stay—educated on the risks.** Nonprofits are using social networks in greater numbers than even for-profit companies. It is important for leaders to keep abreast of exposures and changing regulations and mandates in areas like hiring, confidentiality, IP rights, disclosure, defamation and others. Many organizations are purchasing additional insurance coverage to specifically address social media liability. Do your homework about the legal exposures and other risks that arise from your particular uses of social media.
2. **Integrate social-specific clauses into current risk management policies.** Layer social media references and policies into existing codes of conduct and employee handbooks as well as escalation practices and crisis communication plans. Revisit your entire risk management plan to see where social media components should be addressed. Review the plan every 3-6 months to make sure it is still relevant and up to date. To begin creating a custom social media policy that fits your nonprofit, consider subscribing to www.myriskmanagementpolicies.org.
3. **Solicit input from all departments.** When drafting social policies, involve people with cross-functional expertise and responsibilities. Social media use touches marketing, HR, finance, legal, IT and a number of other functional areas within a typical organization. Bring all parties to the table to discuss what the policies should be and how best to implement them.
4. **Have clearly defined objectives for using social media.** If your organization uses social networks for marketing and outreach, make sure you communicate the metrics and goals for each of the channels (e.g., 10,000 new “Likes” per month on Facebook, 500 retweets a week on Twitter). Everyone who posts content or responds to the comments of others is representing your organization and should be clear on the objectives and “voice” for each channel.
5. **Monitor, monitor and monitor some more.** Dedicate whatever time and resources it takes to stay tuned in (in real time) to each of the social channels you use. If someone posts something critical or inflammatory, you should be prepared to react (note that “react” may include exercising restraint!). Likewise, if someone posts something congratulatory or complimentary, you should also be ready to respond. The viral nature of social networks means your response could be viewed by millions of people in a matter of minutes.

Social media channels offer incredible opportunities for nonprofits to advance their reach, but the unique risks of social platforms must be identified, understood, and managed.

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