

Monitoring Employee Posts on Social Media: Supporting HR as a Proactive Business Partner

An Executive Brief From Richard Teed, President of LBi Software

Some HR case management solutions, including LBi HR HelpDesk, can now integrate with social media platforms. With just a click or two, an HR leader can easily and quickly monitor what any employee is saying about the company on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social forums.

The reason you might consider following the social media footprints of your employees becomes strikingly obvious when you look at how ubiquitous social media has become.

Consider these statistics:

1. Facebook finished 2012 with an average of 618 million “daily active users,” up 28 percent from the previous year.¹
2. Twitter now has over 500 million users² and processes nearly as many tweets each day.³
3. LinkedIn had more than 200 million members in over 200 countries and territories as of Dec. 31, 2012.⁴

Despite that avalanche of use, one study of nearly 200 multinational companies found that barely half have policies in place regarding employee use of social media and networking, although 76 percent of those companies use social networking for business purposes.⁵

In some quarters, using automation to track what employees are saying on social media may sound a little Orwellian, too much like Big Brother prying into the lives of private citizens. This argument has gotten some traction in the general media over the last couple of years.

On the other hand, giving HR the ability to know in real time exactly what an employee is telling the world about their employer is just a modern version of an old story. Before the advent of social media, an HR leader might hear secondhand what a dissatisfied employee told a group of co-workers standing around the water cooler or chatting in the break room.

The bottom line is this: It doesn't matter whether companies are using sophisticated software and technology to monitor what an employee says on Facebook, as LBi HR HelpDesk does, or reading what an employee thinks about the company in the pages of the local newspaper. Monitoring social media is simply another way to keep up with what is being said about the company in public forums.

¹ Facebook. Facebook Reports Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2012 Results. Jan. 30, 2013. <http://investor.fb.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=736911>

² Lunden, Ingrid. Twitter May Have 500 million-plus Users But Only 170 Million Are Active, 75 Percent On Twitter's Own Clients. TechCrunch. July 12, 2012. <http://techcrunch.com/2012/07/31/twitter-may-have-500m-users-but-only-170m-are-active-75-on-twitters-own-clients/>

³ Martinez, Jose. Twitter CEO Dick Costolo Reveals Staggering Number of Tweets Per Day. Complex.com. Oct. 28, 2012. <http://www.complex.com/tech/2012/10/twitter-ceo-dick-costolo-reveals-staggering-number-of-tweets-per-day>

⁴ LinkedIn. <http://press.linkedin.com/about>

⁵ Proskauer International Labor & Employment Group. More Than 75 Percent of Businesses Use Social Media, Nearly Half Do Not Have Social Networking Policies. July 14, 2011. <http://www.proskauer.com/news/press-releases/july-14-2011/more-than-75-percent-of-businesses-use-social-media-nearly-half-do-not-have-social-networking-policies/>

Building this capability into an HR

help desk just makes sense. In fact, we recently enhanced this attribute in LBi HR HelpDesk in direct response to what we heard from clients, prospective customers and others in the HR world at conferences and in conversations. We heard that companies would place a high value on being able to monitor what's being said about them on social media.

How companies use the information they glean

from public social media forums will vary widely. The use will depend on variables as distinct as corporate culture and formal guidelines concerning confidentiality and public disclosure of company information.

More specifically, being able to monitor

employee discussions about the company can uncover employee discontent or workplace problems that are not being reported within the organization or through the formal HR case management system. The potential value is even more obvious when an employee has a grievance outstanding against the organization.

An employee's posts to a public forum might

also be useful in resolving a grievance. The posts could bring to light information that was not provided as part of the formal case-management process.

Ultimately, it boils down to this:

Amid the growing use of social media by workers of every demographic, companies should at least consider monitoring how their employees are representing the company to people around the globe. LBi Software is among the companies that give HR administrators the means to accomplish this by helping them legally, efficiently and easily get a more robust and complete look at how their employees perceive their company.

Generally, companies seem to be taking one of three paths when it comes to employees and social media:

- 1. Restricting or denying access to social sites from the workplace**
- 2. Establishing policies for what employees may post about the company to social media**
- 3. Monitoring employee use of social media**

Giving HR access to monitor social media discussions can help the organization determine whether it needs to review or implement policies regarding access to social sites from the workplace. This kind of insight can also support the company in considering whether to establish or revise policies on what employees may post about their employer.