

CEO guide to be social

Today's CEO knows all too well the value of their company's reputation and the role they play as the company's leader in shaping and maintaining it. Increasingly, they also are becoming keenly aware of the influence social media has on positive perception – and the power it has to damage or destroy it.

In addition, CEOs know that to allocate scarce corporate resources (time, energy, intellectual property, etc.), they need to do so wisely and responsibly. Yes, the smart ones know they need a plan.

Have a policy

CEOs should lead the development of a corporate social media policy about which every employee is aware and for which each employee is accountable. Not only will a good policy protect employees and CEOs in online conversations, it demonstrates awareness and appreciation of the power and influence of social media.

Have a strategy

CEOs need to be engaged in online conversations in just the right way. They may not need to lead them; they certainly want to monitor them. Their voice, though, as cautious as it may be, will be noticed and appreciated.

Listen to the experts - admit upfront it's not the CEO

CEOs are used to being the expert and being in charge. Chances are, though, that CEOs don't know squat about social media. They should admit it. They're smart people. They'll learn quickly if they listen to the experts (whether from inside or outside the company), and they move into this new area of engagement with care and caution.

Walk before you run

CEO involvement in social media doesn't mean daily posting on Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Pinterest. Being visible on the company website, perhaps only with video messages, may be enough (at least for now) if that is comfortable and feels natural. At the same time, CEOs didn't become CEOs because they shied away from learning new things and taking measured and calculated risks. That same caution should be applied to a CEO's social media engagement.

Be prepared to listen and engage

CEOs need to remember that social media is, well, social. By becoming involved, they need to commit themselves to an online relationship in which it is more important to listen and contribute than to be in charge. Monitoring and participating online conversations provides insights and learning. It can be time-consuming. It also can be invaluable.

Be authentic

Being involved in social media is a lot like being in the classroom, the locker room, the lunch room or the board room. It's easier to make friends and be a part of that "community" when relaxed, natural and honest. CEOs should let their personalities show in their online activity. Remember, if CEOs walk before they run and use videos or simple posts that are carefully considered, they can be themselves and still feel in control.

Maximize the use of video

The CEO can have videos scripted and shot just for the company website and/or the company YouTube channel. The company also can capture and edit footage of the CEO "walking the floor," chatting with employees or shareholders, or meeting with government leaders. Video can show emotion and nuance and can also be controlled.

Empower colleagues and make it cultural

CEOs who share the love and encourage other company leaders to contribute online demonstrate a commitment to social media and make it part of corporate culture.