

# Practical HR Applications for Social Media

**S**ocial networking is great fun. You can keep up with your friends, locate old high school classmates, and monitor the activities of distant family members you used to hear about only in annual holiday letters.

But do Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn have any legitimate business value for HR professionals? Absolutely. Three areas where social networking sites can help you include:

- Recruiting;
- Communicating with employees during crises;
- Reducing demand on HR staff by helping employees help themselves.

## Recruitment

According to a poll taken by Jump Start Social Media, Kingston, NJ, a social media consulting firm, 75% of hiring managers use LinkedIn, 48% use Facebook, and 26% use Twitter to research candidates before making a job offer. When sourcing job candidates, 66% visit LinkedIn, 23% visit Facebook and 16% use Twitter to find job candidates to fill openings.

Social media can be used in three primary ways when recruiting:

- Posting available jobs;
- Looking for potential candidates;
- Checking out applicants.

The Internet makes it easy to supplement traditional reference-checking processes. Caution: Overreliance on the Internet for information may increase your risk of liability, as there is little assurance of reliability, and you may miss some good candidates whose online profile does not represent them well.

## Communicating in a Crisis

While most organizations today think of social media as a means of communicating with external audiences, they can also fit perfectly into an organization's crisis communication plan for internal audiences.

HR departments can help put plans in place to ensure that company information is reaching important internal constituencies *before* a crisis occurs. A "social media aware" crisis plan can:

**IMMEDIATELY CONNECT** with employees during crisis situations in which safety may be an issue.

**ARM EMPLOYEES** with important messages about what the company is doing, so they can respond to questions that their families, friends and acquaintances may have. These "key messages" are critical to help protect the company's image, ensure consistency and avoid rumor mills dominating the information marketplace.

**PROVIDE EMPLOYEES** a trusted source of information rather than forcing them to rely on other reports they may see in the media or read on social media channels that they may already be a part of.

**REMAIN IN CONTACT** with employees who may not have access to normal internal communication tools such as the company intranet site.

Dallas Lawrence is vice president of digital media at Levick Strategic Communications, in Washington, DC, a firm that specializes in crisis communication. "Every single company in America that has more than 10 employees has at least one that is using social media," says Lawrence. "If your company is in a crisis and you're not using social media to monitor what's being said and to proactively communicate with internal audiences, you're missing a huge opportunity," he says.

## Helping Staff Help Themselves

You can use social media to leverage the wide knowledge and experience of your customer base. Companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Lyris, Jama Software and BestBuy use social media to allow customers to engage with each other to get their technical and customer service questions answered. This reduces calls to customer service departments and help



desks. More importantly, it improves service and cements relationships with valued and experienced customers.

Facebook and Twitter can be used to create private groups accessible only to designated audiences. Other tools, such as Yammer — a Twitter-like system for internal company systems — are designed for use within organizations.

Companies using social media can generate useful content on an ongoing basis, content created not only by the HR department, but by users whose collective knowledge can be extremely valuable. In addition, through monitoring the activity in these communities, HR can learn about employee concerns, interests and ideas, prompting proactive actions and policy innovations. ▲

## For More Information:

**Mashable: The Social Media Guide**

<http://mashable.com/>

**Chris Brogan blog on social media news**

<http://www.chrisbrogan.com/>

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Voice: (952) 894-6720

Fax: (952) 894-1066

E-mail: [staffingdecisions@mac.com](mailto:staffingdecisions@mac.com)

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