

THIRTY-SIX BLOG RULES: BEST PRACTICES TO KEEP YOU OUT OF COURT WITH YOUR CORPORATE REPUTATION INTACT

Blog Rule #1: The blog is an electronic communications powerhouse that is likely to have greater impact on business communications and corporate reputations than e-mail, instant messaging, and traditional marketing-oriented websites combined.

Blog Rule #2: Business blogs are not necessary or appropriate for every organization. Evaluate the benefits and assess the risks before leaping into the blogosphere.

Blog Rule #3: Savvy business owners and executives must learn how to strategically and successfully manage the blogosphere today—or risk potentially unpleasant and expensive consequences tomorrow.

Blog Rule #4: It's the casual, conversational, anything-goes nature of the blog that makes it both so appealing to blog writers and readers—and so potentially dangerous to business.

Blog Rule #5: An organization without an external blog program may risk losing position, market share, reputation, and sales to tech-savvy competitors who have already recognized—and tapped into—the power of the blogosphere.

Blog Rule #6: The strategic management of blogs or any other electronic business communications tool begins with the establishment of written rules and policies governing usage and content.

Blog Rule #7: A business blog opens the organization up to potential disasters, including the loss of trade secrets, confidential information, and intellectual property; negative publicity, damaged reputations, and public embarrassment; workplace lawsuits alleging copyright infringement, defamation, sexual harassment, and other claims; court sanctions, legal settlements, and regulatory fines; and lost employee productivity.

Blog Rule #8: Management, technology, and the legal system have not yet caught up with the potential benefits and risks of business blogging.

Blog Rule #9: Strategic blog management begins with the establishment of a clear objective. In other words, why does your organization want to blog?

Blog Rule #10: Don't allow IT (or legal, records management, or human resources) to dictate your business blog program. Work as a team to implement rules, policies, and procedures based on the best practices detailed in *Blog Rules*.

Blog Rule #11: Require employees to sign a confidentiality agreement to protect trade secrets and confidential data belonging to the organization, employees, customers, business partners and other third parties. Cover blog posts and comments published on the organization's business blogs, employees' personal blogs, and other external blogs, as well.

Blog Rule #12: Use discipline to maximize employee compliance with blog rules, policies, and procedures. Put blog content and usage rules in writing, and stress the fact that the organization's rules and policies apply regardless of whether employees are blogging at the office or at home on their own time and equipment. Inform employees that any violation of the organization's rules and policies may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Blog Rule #13: Treat blog posts and comments as business records that must be retained, archived, and readily available to courts or regulators in the event of a workplace lawsuit or regulatory investigation.

Blog Rule #14: Use the establishment of your blog program as an opportunity to review all electronic communications policies. Update (or create) e-mail, instant message, Internet, intranet, and blog policies based on best practices detailed in *Blog Rules*.

Blog Rule #15: Employee training is key to compliance with blog content, usage rules, and retention policy.

Blog Rule #16: Expect to see employees' blog posts and readers' comments enter the evidence pool in sexual harassment claims, discrimination cases, and hostile work environment lawsuits.

Blog Rule #17: Enhance your organization's legal position—and increase the likelihood of successfully defending a sexual harassment or hostile work environment claim someday—by establishing a comprehensive written blog policy and enforcing that policy with a consistent program of training, technology, and discipline.

Blog Rule #18: As a third-party copyright infringer (thanks to customers' blog comments) the organization could be subject to treble damages. Seek safe-harbor protection from liability through the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA).

Blog Rule #19: A strict anti-blog policy, backed by content security technology, helps publicly traded companies and regulated firms ensure employee compliance with regulators' blog-related content, usage, and retention rules.

Blog Rule #20: The blog is all about content.

Blog Rule #21: Blogging culture demands absolute honesty. The blogosphere hates a phony!

Blog Rule #22: Assign a lawyer or other responsible party to review, edit, and—as necessary—delete readers' comments pre-post. All it takes is one inappropriate comment to trigger a workplace lawsuit, regulatory investigation, or blog mob attack.

Blog Rule #23: Blogs allow smaller companies to create immediate intimate connections with consumers and build loyalty without spending millions of dollars on traditional mainstream media advertising.

Blog Rule #24: Inappropriate content is inappropriate content, whether it's transmitted via e-mail or posted (and permalined) on a blog. The primary difference is that risky blog content has a never-ending "viral" quality. You can count on a juicy, salacious, or otherwise unprofessional and embarrassing blog post to be read, linked to, and commented upon by countless readers for years to come.

Blog Rule #25: Incorporate the rules of blog etiquette into the organization's blog policy. By addressing and enforcing blog etiquette, employers can maximize civil business behavior in the blogosphere while minimizing the likelihood of inappropriate entries that might offend readers, trigger litigation, or otherwise harm the organization.

Blog Rule #26: Use blog monitoring tools to track what is being written about your organization and help control comment spam and splog.

Blog Rule #27: Although technology struggles to solve the challenge of surging splog attacks and comment spam, business bloggers (and individuals who are blogging at home) are advised to do what they can on their own to battle spam in the blogosphere.

Blog Rule #28: Blogging can get you fired! Hundreds of employees have been fired, or dooced, for blogging about their employers.

Blog Rule #29: Blogging can get you sued! Given the growing popularity of blogs and the propensity of bloggers to use their sites to opine on people, products, service quality, and businesses, the potential for litigation (aimed at organizations and individuals) is huge.

Blog Rule #30: The First Amendment does not protect bloggers.

Blog Rule #31: Thanks to incoming links, outgoing links, permalinks, ping services, and syndication, a factually inaccurate or otherwise damaging post can bounce around the Internet from one blog to millions of other blogs forever—archived and ever-accessible to new readers.

Blog Rule #32: Blogs are rapidly—and forever—changing the way PR people and media relations professionals do business.

Blog Rule #33: It pays to put customer evangelists and brand bloggers to work creating buzz in the blogosphere.

Blog Rule #34: Blogging by CEOs and other C-level executives who want to engage internal and external stakeholders is on the rise.

Blog Rule #35: Blogging may not be the best way for CEOs to communicate confidential, potentially embarrassing, or otherwise damaging information to employees and other insiders. There simply is no taking your words back once your blog post goes live.

Blog Rule #36: Blogs are a phenomenal vehicle for attacking companies, brands, and individuals. Be proactive. Prepare today for the blog attack that is likely to hit tomorrow.