

# 7 simple ways to use social media to engage employees

*Create community and help employees work more efficiently*

Smart guide



# It's time for internal social media to reach its potential

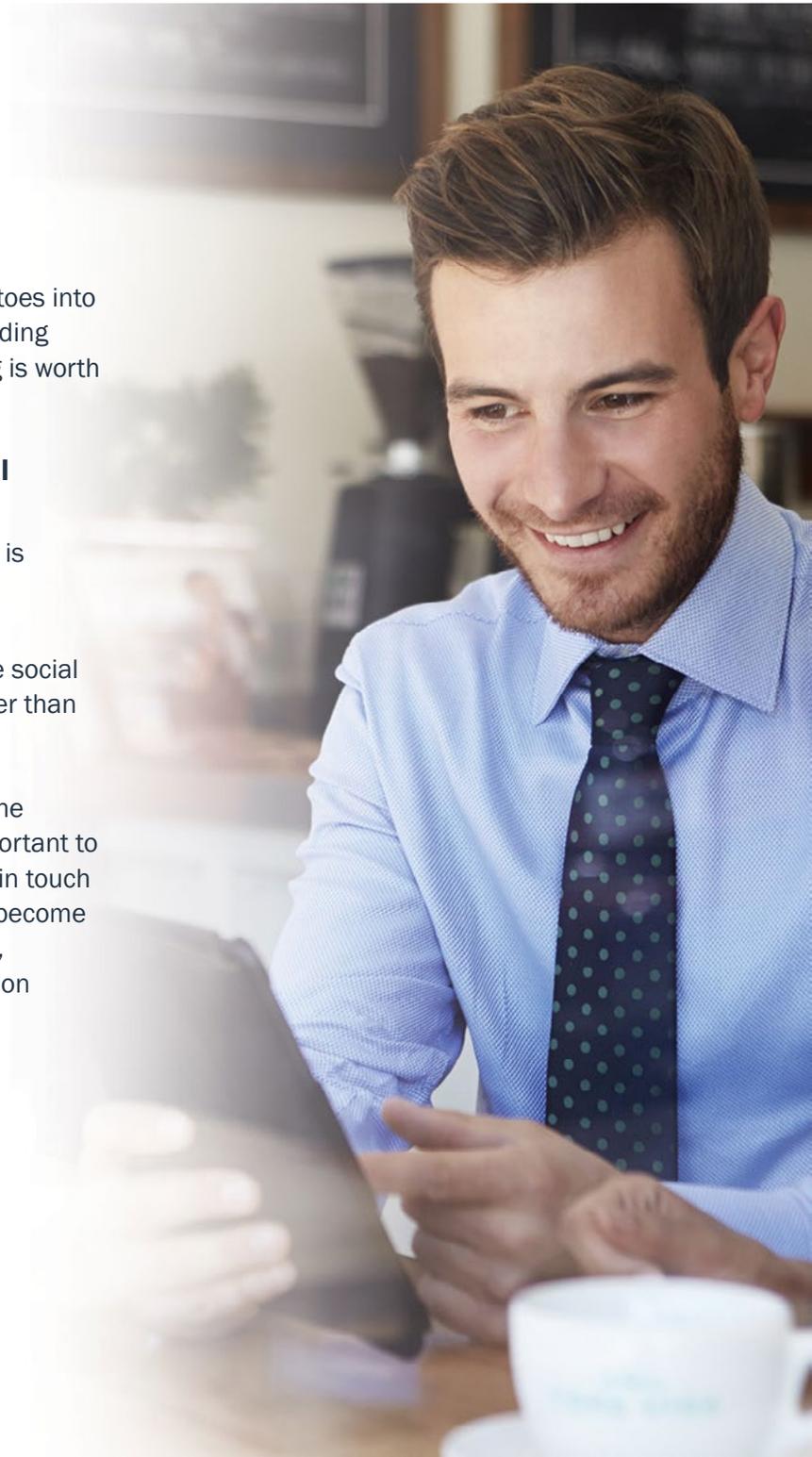
Everybody into the pool! Although many organizations are still just dipping their toes into social media, most are gradually concluding that this still-new way of communicating is worth exploring.

## However, internal social media still faces two main obstacles:

- ▶ Leaders still believe that social media is a waste of time
- ▶ Employees also don't see much value (other than networking)—they perceive social media as “something else to do” rather than an integral work tool

**Here's the irony:** Social media outside the workplace is becoming increasingly important to the way we live. Sure, it's about staying in touch with friends. But social media has also become essential to how we receive information, get help and gain credible perspectives on important issues.

The best part of social media? Its potential to encourage employees to connect, share ideas and solve problems.



# It's time for internal social media to reach its potential

Of course, the challenge is that, for better or worse, social media is different from other forms of communication. **Social media isn't packaged or approved. It's multidirectional, and can cover any topic employees are interested in. And social media is participative, so employees can create content, comment or otherwise express their viewpoints.**

It's easy to get started with simple forms of social media: rating, recommending, posting. As you get more comfortable, begin to introduce collaboration tools: discussion threads, networks, games. Approach social media not as a completely new experience, but as a work tool (like email or your phone).

## To get started, know your employees

- ▶ The most effective social media programs focus on employee needs, not the technology.
- ▶ Learn employees' demographics to understand their communication preferences.
- ▶ To find out what social media employees will use, ask what they do at home.
- ▶ Understand how employees do their jobs and introduce social media tools that support their work.
- ▶ Conduct focus groups. Ask: "Based on your personal experiences, how can we use social media inside the company?"
- ▶ Before adding social tools, understand your company's collaboration DNA. Interview employees.
- ▶ The more you know about employee preferences, the better you can promote the benefits of social media.

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



**Q** How much time do Americans spend on social media sites each day?

- a. 1.7 hours
- b. 2.7 hours
- c. 3.7 hours
- d. 4.7 hours

**A** Click for answer!



Social media has long since ceased to be the preserve of college students and teenagers.

Every generational cohort—from ages

**18–64**

—reads or views content online



# 1. Start with little widgets (and see big results)

What's a safe and simple way to start?  
The best baby step is a **widget**.

Widgets—also referred to as modules, snippets and plug-ins—are mini web applications that are easily embedded within a web page. Best of all, widgets are free to download in most cases so there's little monetary investment.

## Widgets to consider

While there are tens of thousands of widgets available, three have strong potential in the employee communications arena: **Rate**, **Share** and **Subscribe**.

Let's show you how each can work for you.

### Rate ★★★★★

This widget allows site visitors to rate your content based on a 5-star rating system.

#### Benefit for visitors

- ▶ Provides a mechanism for giving feedback
- ▶ Helps visitors find content rated favorably by their peers

#### Benefit for internal communicators

- ▶ Provides insight into standard web metrics (i.e., hits, page views, etc.)
- ▶ Drives improvements to writing

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



Q

Which social media site do companies use the most?

- a. Twitter
- b. Facebook
- c. LinkedIn

A

Click for answer!

# 1. Start with little widgets (and see big results)

Share



This enables site visitors to send a link of the web page to their colleagues via email.

## Benefit for visitors

- ▶ Enables and encourages quick and easy knowledge sharing

## Benefit for internal communicators

- ▶ Helps identify key topics of interest
- ▶ Increases readership through content referral

Subscribe



This helps your visitors easily subscribe to your RSS feed using any feed reader.

## Benefit for visitors

- ▶ Allows visitors to opt-in to content of interest and control the flow of information they receive

## Benefit for internal communicators

- ▶ Helps to manage one of employees greatest complaints: information overload

## How do you rate?

One of the hottest external social media tools are rating systems, those consumer-driven 5-star-to-none systems that rate books on Amazon, hotels on travel sites and contractors on Angie's List.

Writes Kevin Maney in *Atlantic* magazine, "...rating is about to spread like a pandemic. Everything—everyone—will get rated by Web users. You. Me. The dentist. All the hairstylists in town. The sermons in every place of worship. Youth soccer coaches. Lunch meats."

For internal communication, ratings encourage employees to get involved. This is important as employees expect communication to be more than something they watch or read—it's a process they participate in.



## 2. Use the right tool for the job

Have you considered using social media for employee communications, but you're not sure which tool will get the most traction?

Try giving employees what they prefer. Use surveys or polls to determine the most popular social media outlet among colleagues, then adopt a similar tool.

*Here's how to get started:*

If your employees do this at home...	..then try using this tool at the office	Here's how:
Social networking	Internal colleague network	Build a social network on your intranet where employees can input profile information, "friend" colleagues and post comments on each others' profile pages.
Posting quick, short status updates	Yammer	Use a microblog to update colleagues on daily workloads, seek out or offer help on projects, post links to inspirational articles or spread the word about cookies in the kitchen.
Collecting content	Widgets for rating or tagging content	Add buttons to your intranet that let employees rate articles, blogs and columns on a five-star scale. Allow users to tag pages with keywords and help improve your search capabilities.
Researching and sharing knowledge	Internal wikis	Create wikis for projects so colleagues can add, revise or delete information in real-time, across departments and geographies.
Watching videos for entertainment	YouTube channels	Reach out to employees by creating a YouTube channel for leader videos, training sessions and news. Let employees post their own videos and respond to each others' videos.

### 3. Promote adoption

If you build it (a new social media platform), you can't assume that they (employees) will come. Busy, distracted employees won't necessarily become instant adopters of your social media effort, no matter how well designed your program may be.

That's why you need to invest in a change communication effort to A) inform about your cool new tools, B) build belief about their value and C) provide help about how to.

*To encourage employees to use social media, follow these 8 steps:*



**Snack and chat:** Create a break room where employees can grab a free snack and have an online conversation.



**Emphasize the benefits:** quick collaboration, easy knowledge sharing, being in the know.



**Overcome the obstacles:** Ask employees why they aren't using social media and share the answers.



**Make it an event:** Have a social media post-a-thon. The more employee participation, the better.



**Use success stories:** Highlight employees who use social media to work smarter and more efficiently.



**Have fun:** Run a contest and give out small prizes to celebrate employee participation.



**Reach out and touch someone:** Ask employees to send out hellos to co-workers they don't know.



**Buddy up:** Recruit social media ambassadors to answer questions and encourage use.

#### Experiment to build adoption

- ▶ Gradually introduce social media to employees.
- ▶ Engage groups of employees in trials of social media channels.
- ▶ Social media is fluid. If something doesn't work, use it to create a new experience.
- ▶ Understand that what works today may need to change tomorrow.
- ▶ Start small. Set up a test group.
- ▶ Create a pilot. Ask participants to share their experiences.

## 4. Teach nervous users how to

Just because you're fabulous at Facebook, a pro at Pinterest and a terrific Tweeter doesn't mean that everyone in your organization is equally adept.

It's likely that a portion of your employees are Baby Boomers who grew up using typewriters and telephones, not tablets and mobile devices, and may approach new technologies with caution.

Although Baby Boomers may need extra help when it comes to social media, everyone could use a little advice. You don't want "I don't know how" or "It's too hard" to be barriers to adoption. Make sure to include plenty of "how to" in your communication.

*Help employees get comfortable by:*

- 1 Hosting webinars** for workers who aren't digital natives. Cover the basics. Debunk misconceptions.
- 2 Helping newbies by holding a web chat** to introduce them to useful company contacts.
- 3 Creating step-by-step video tutorials** that offer easy-to-follow, visually appealing instruction.
- 4 Developing a two-hour or half-day boot camp**, providing intensive training for those who need it.
- 5 Considering users' diverse learning needs**; offer quick tips, tutorials, FAQs and training.



## 5. Invite employees to create content

Keeping your communication fresh and interesting is a challenge, especially when budgets are tight and staff is stretched. Why not make the transition from creating all the content yourself to letting employees contribute? You'll reduce your workload, make your site more engaging and use social media in a productive, participative way.

*Here are 4 ways to build employee-generated content on your site:*



### Launch a quick poll

You can post a new question each week, such as “How do you overcome presentation jitters?”, with multiple-choice responses.



### Post recommendations

Allow people to recommend websites, videos, software or training classes that helped them learn or solve a problem at work.



### Create an event slideshow

Nearly everyone has a camera or phone that takes photos. Ask people to submit photos of events, such as company meetings. Create a slide show with captions.



### Post videos

You can invite co-workers to create three- to four-minute videos around a theme, such as “How my team promotes innovation.”



### 5 photo-sharing ideas

**Recognize a co-worker.** Submit a photo of a colleague who's working to achieve our company goals. Include a caption that's 25 words or less.

**What did you learn?** Take a photo at a conference or a seminar. Tell us three things you learned.

**An interesting idea...** Share a photo depicting an idea you have for increasing efficiency or saving costs.

**Making meetings more productive.** What suggestions do you have for improving meetings? Take a photo of your concept.

**Show us where you work.** Submit a photo of your office or facility from an unusual angle or perspective.

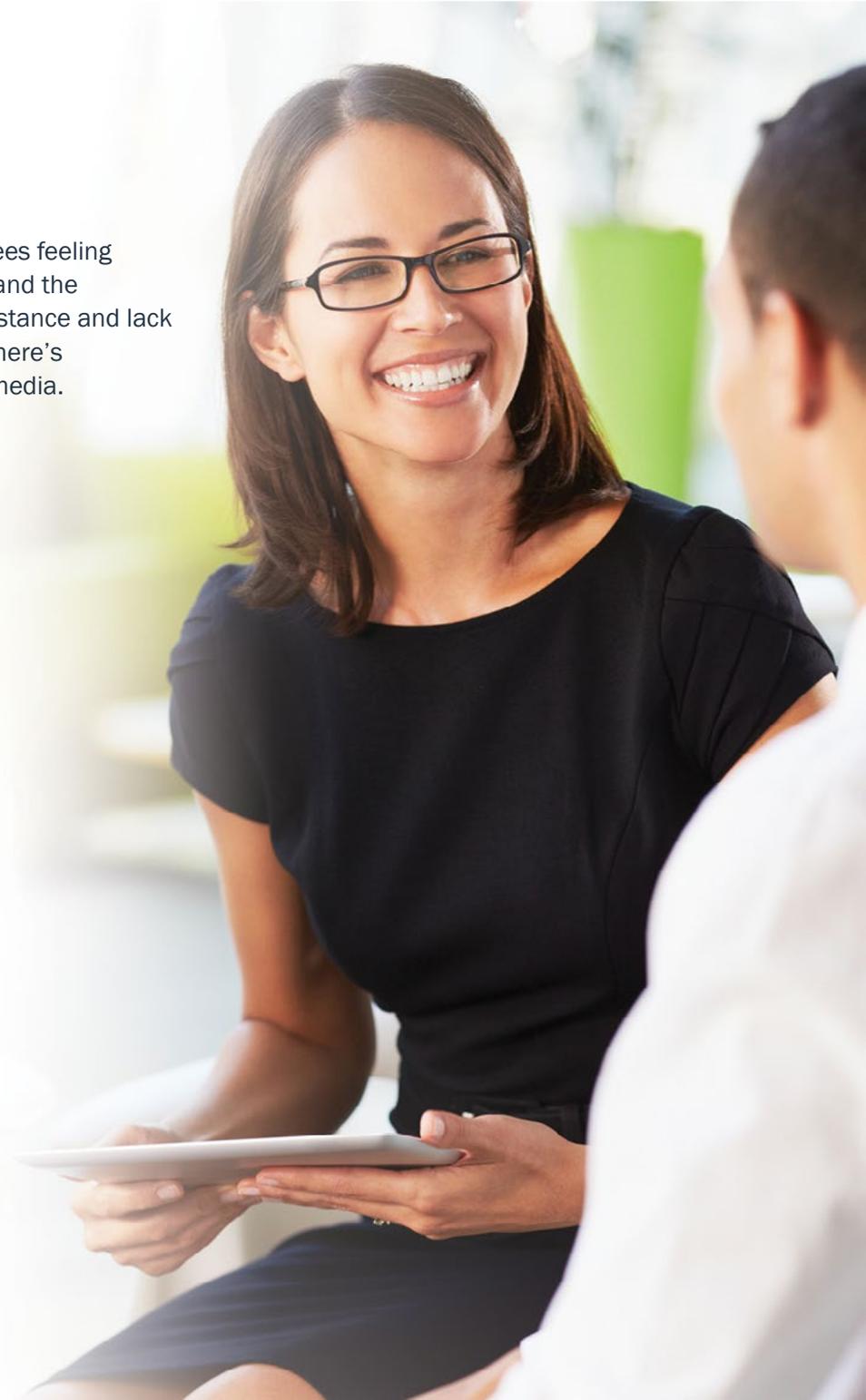
## 6. Stimulate collaboration

Not so long ago, going to work meant showing up every day at a central office or facility where it was easy to collaborate with your boss and colleagues. However, an increasing number of employees don't work at headquarters but from a remote or satellite location or even from home.

The challenge is to keep employees feeling connected—to managers, peers and the organization—despite physical distance and lack of face-to-face contact. Luckily, there's a perfect tool for the job: social media.

*Options like Twitter, wikis and social networking sites:*

- 1** Help employees better understand the company's goals, values and strategy
- 2** Give managers easy ways to stay connected with their team members
- 3** Increase the visibility and accessibility of senior leaders
- 4** Allow employees to share ideas and help each other solve problems
- 5** Create ample opportunities for feedback and two-way communication



## 6. Stimulate collaboration

*How to create collaboration?  
Here are 5 suggestions:*

- 1. Great ideas can come from anyone.** Create a microsite where employees can ask questions and get ideas.
- 2. Build networks to connect employees.** Consider discussion boards that let employees share thoughts about a topic.
- 3. Having an internal conference?** Create a platform for participants to share highlights with colleagues.

**4. Make social media matter.** Host a discussion to gather ideas for a business problem.

**5. Help employees set up groups.** Allow colleagues to collaborate and connect with others.



### *Evidence that social media improves productivity*

Leaders worry that social media will encourage employees to waste time. But according to researchers at the McKinsey Global Institute, social media has the potential to raise productivity.

The problem is that today, managers, professionals and sales people spend: 28% of work days answering, writing or responding to email, 19% trying to track down information and 14% collaborating with co-workers.

According to researchers, communicating and collaborating via social technology, would increase the efficiency of workers doing these activities by 25%.

### TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



**Q** What percentage of Americans age 50–64 use social networking?

- a. 25%
- b. 35%
- c. 55%
- d. 65%

**A** [Click for answer!](#)

## 7. Make it easy for leaders to jump in

Despite the promise of social media, it won't be successful unless senior leaders participate. Yet leaders barely have time to manage their current communication responsibilities, much less add another task to their list.

The good news is that even the most time-pressed leader can have a presence on social media. These social media platforms are not only fast, they're also easier to complete. Got your timer ready? Let's go!

 **Encourage leaders to “tweet” (create very short updates) on your internal Twitter-like platform.** Answer these questions: “What am I working on?” or “What’s my thought about this topic?” in about 140 characters.

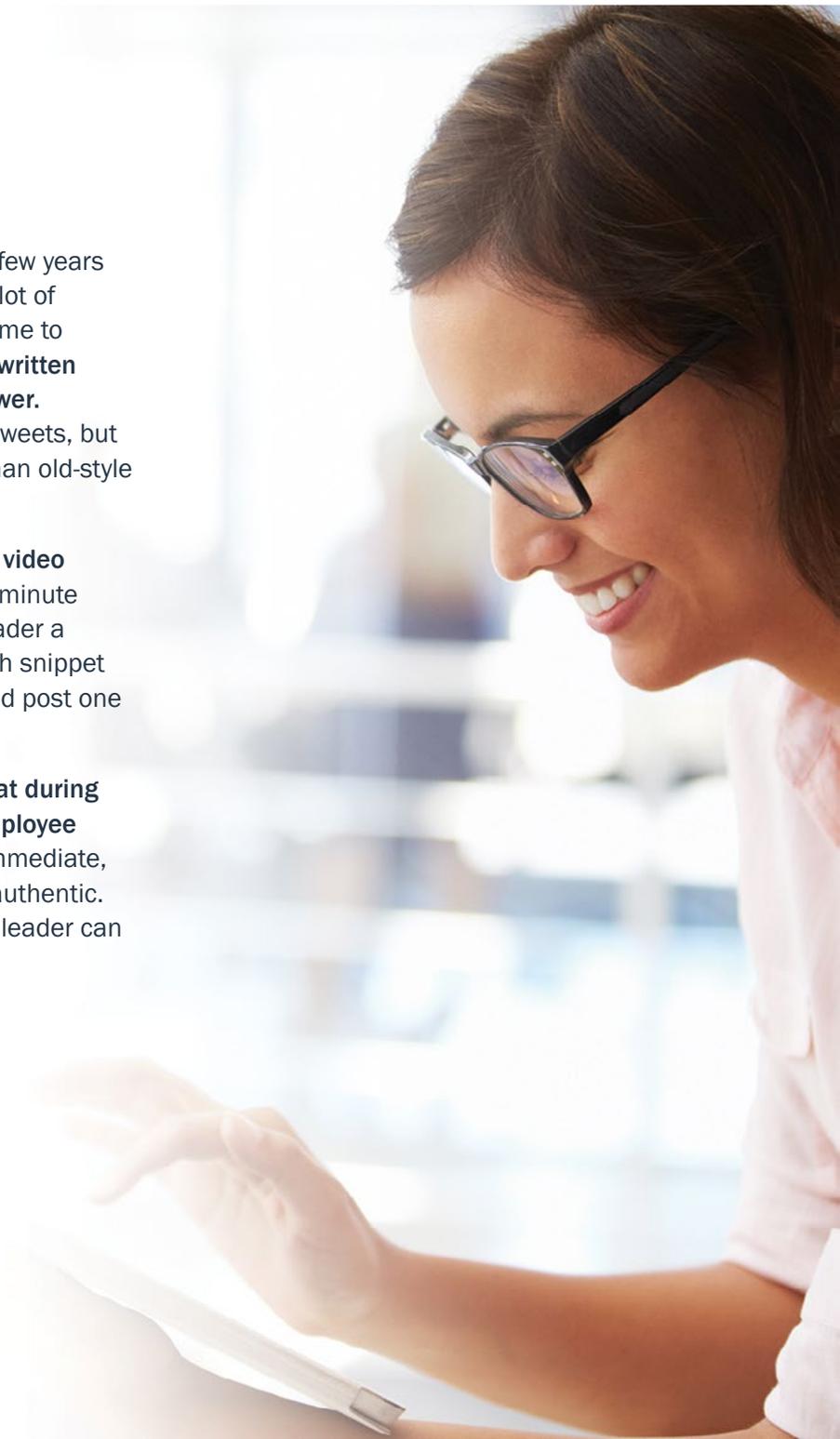
 Writing can be hard, especially for perfectionist leaders. **Say it with pictures.** Encourage your leader to use his/her smartphone to take informal photos of what he/she is observing, especially at events. Create a process for the leader to post the photo with a caption.

 Blogs were a popular trend a few years ago, but long essays take a lot of work to write—and a lot of time to read. **Suggest a microblog, written observations in 50 words or fewer.**

Microblogs are not as restrictive as tweets, but are easier and more time efficient than old-style blogs.

 **Give leaders a YouTube style video experience.** Schedule a 30-minute video shoot, and ask the leader a series of questions. Edit each snippet into a 30- to 60-second segment, and post one a week.

 **Schedule a one-hour Q&A chat during which a leader answers employee questions.** The session is immediate, it's in real time and it feels authentic. Plus, when the hour is over, the leader can check it off his/her list.



## 7. Make it easy for leaders to jump in

### Get buy-in for employee social media

Social media is a great way to engage employees, connect remote workers and encourage collaboration. It can be tricky to get buy-in, when leaders have concerns like:

Social media will reduce productivity; we run the risk of someone sharing confidential information; or what happens if an employee violates our policies—or even breaks the law?

To find out how to make the case for social media and gain support from senior leaders we used our internal Yammer network to solicit ideas from our Davis & Company colleagues. Here's what they suggested:

### Know the facts

- ▶ Research external studies and use data to show how leading companies use social media to build employee engagement.
- ▶ Conduct focus groups to understand employees' social media needs. The most effective programs concentrate on the employee, so demonstrate how your proposed approach will solve a workplace need.

### Create a controlled experience

Senior leaders are often nervous because social media seems so open-ended. Once it's launched, it runs 24/7. Ask a leader to host a one-hour live chat. Here's how it works: the leader posts a topic, employees ask questions and the leader responds.

### Pilot an initiative

Once you've practiced using one-hour increments, expand your efforts by developing a pilot. Start small; take baby steps toward your goal. By introducing social media in one group, location or function, you can test your program before introducing it broadly. Report on results to show senior leadership that social media can, indeed, work here.

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



Q

What are the average tweets per day on Twitter?

- a. 28 million
- b. 48 million
- c. 58 million
- d. 68 million

A

Click for answer!



### There's a policy for that

- ▶ To avoid inappropriate postings, **develop social media guidelines.**
- ▶ **Manage expectations.** To be successful, employees need clear direction.
- ▶ The simplest, clearest social media guideline: **What will get you fired offline will get you fired online.**
- ▶ Effective guidelines should **encourage social media.** Example: 59% of media companies ask employees to tweet.
- ▶ **Suggest how much time employees should spend on social media.** Be specific: How much is ideal?



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## About Davis & Company

Davis & Company is an award-winning firm that helps companies reach, engage and motivate their employees.

Founded in 1984, Davis & Company develops innovative solutions and programs that improve the success of employee communication for leading companies such as Nestlé, PepsiCo and Pfizer. The company also offers web-based workshops, industry reports, how-to books and newsletters for communication professionals on important topics pertaining to employee communication. The firm is based in Glen Rock, N.J. For more information, visit [www.davisandco.com](http://www.davisandco.com).



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