



Navigating **TikTok** in the Workplace

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Introduction

Social media is more popular than ever. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, BeReal and TikTok allow individuals to share videos, photographs and text, stay connected to family and friends and express themselves. According to a 2022 DataReportal report, approximately **81% of the total U.S. population** uses social media. Data from online recruitment company Zippia revealed that in 2022, **77% of social media users** engage with social media at work regardless of their employer's workplace policy. As a result, considering how best to approach employees' use of social media in the workplace is critical and necessary for employers of all sizes.

Social media has made it more difficult for employees to separate their personal lives from work. It's becoming increasingly common for employees to post content while at work or about their jobs. Many employees share what they like or don't like about their employer on social media, blurring the lines between private life and the workplace and, in some cases, creating issues for employers. After all, a platform like TikTok can suddenly and unexpectedly amplify an employee's voice when their post receives **thousands of views overnight**. These work-related posts can send potentially powerful messages, positive or negative, to others about an organization. Employers have valid reasons to be concerned about employees using social media at work, during working hours or while using company property, especially since posting videos during work meetings or at workstations can trigger privacy and confidentiality concerns and violate company policies. Some employers may be tempted to avoid addressing this topic with employees; however, since most employees are likely active on social media, it may be unavoidable.

In particular, TikTok is relatively new and growing in popularity. The platform's format makes it extremely easy for employees to post content while at work and is popular for airing workplace grievances. Despite its increasing use among employees, it's likely employers have not considered TikTok's impact on their organizations. As many employees might already be using TikTok at work, now is more important than ever for employers to consider how best to navigate TikTok in the workplace.

This guide provides an overview of TikTok and considerations for navigating employee use of the platform in the workplace.

What Is TikTok?

TikTok is one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, **behind Facebook, YouTube and Instagram**. TikTok has approximately 1 billion active monthly users and is extremely popular among younger employees, especially Generation Z, according to data from online marketing blog Backlinko. TikTok stands out from other social media platforms for its extraordinary growth. Between 2018 and 2022, the platform attracted approximately **340 million new active users per year**, Statista reported. Unlike other social media platforms that focus on connecting with friends and acquaintances, TikTok is a video-sharing social media platform. Users share and watch videos ranging from 15 seconds to multiple minutes. Given the platform's popularity, many employees are likely using it during working hours, and, as a result, a workplace may inadvertently serve as the backdrop for these workers' posts, with uniforms, logos or workplaces being displayed.

Many employees use social media as an outlet to discuss, positively and negatively, their work experiences and bosses. Some of these posts can serve as free marketing and recruiting for employers as well as a valuable tool for strengthening employee relationships. In some cases, an employee's post can be more effective than an employer's branding or recruiting efforts. Reports have found that social media posts from employees generate 561% more reach than an employer's post. Half of all employees share content from or about their employer on social media, and 33% of workers do so unprompted, according to a recent study from Weber Shandwick. If an employee's TikTok videos go viral, the employee could become the organization's unofficial spokesperson and even influence or direct conversations regarding workplace norms and dynamics.

On the other hand, TikTok has become the medium for raising grievances about the workplace, including those concerning working conditions and mental health. The platform allows employees to use humor to address difficult and nuanced topics in a succinct manner. For example, employees can provide apt descriptions of workplace issues or grievances without having to provide in-depth explanations. Compared to other platforms, like Facebook, where airing workplace grievances can be tedious and even awkward because doing so requires extensive explanation, TikTok allows users to use short, easily-digestible videos that give users an authentic and personal experience.

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The Impact of Employees' TikTok Posts

Some employers have banned employees from using TikTok to reduce potential risks or to align with their other social media policies. Others have attempted to leverage their employees' TikTok usage to strengthen employee engagement and improve their marketing efforts. Since TikTok seems to be employees' social media platform of choice for discussing work, it's vital that employers understand how employees' TikTok usage and posts can impact their organizations. This section discusses TikTok's potential impact on employers, employee use of the platform, the risks of negative posts and other considerations.

Understanding TikTok's Impact

Some employers have benefited from their employees' TikTok posts. Videos posted on TikTok and other platforms can provide employers with free marketing and expand and strengthen their brand. The marketing employees provide their employers through TikTok posts can often be invaluable. Employee posts tend to have a much wider reach and impact than an employer's efforts. Additionally, Generation Z tends to value the transparency and authenticity TikTok provides. Unlike an employer's paid or targeted marketing efforts, employees can be organic influencers for their employers. This type of marketing can help organizations connect with clients and customers in a powerful way. For instance, employees' TikTok posts can provide organic marketing opportunities that build a community around an employer's product or service fueled by loyal and passionate employees.

Sanctioning TikTok Participation

TikTok can provide employees with an opportunity to collaborate with their employers, share ideas and solve problems. Many employees want to be positive ambassadors for their employers on social media. These employees can have a strong understanding of their employer's customer base. Allowing employees to contribute to an organization's sponsored TikTok posts can build trust and loyalty with employees and improve an employer's marketing efforts. For example, Starbucks allows certain employees to post about their work experiences on TikTok. These employees share their favorite products, explain how they are made and teach customers how to order them. These posts have resulted in millions of views. This approach to social media can make an organization more attractive to job applicants, particularly Generation Z and millennials, whereas

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strict TikTok and other social media policies may persuade job applicants and employees to look elsewhere for work.

Some organizations find ways to allow employees to use TikTok in a positive and rewarding manner. Since most employees are likely active on TikTok or other social media, some employers allow employees to represent their brand professionally and enthusiastically by establishing social media guidelines and encouraging employees to participate. For example, employers have created employee advocacy programs where employees help promote their employer on TikTok and other social media platforms. This may help expand an organization's reach and strengthen its brand organically while engaging its employees and making them feel valued and more invested in the organization, thus aiding in attraction and retention efforts. Since it may be difficult to prohibit employees from making any TikTok postings at work or during work hours, allowing employees to make sanctioned posts can be a positive alternative.

Reducing the Risk of Negative TikTok Posts

While allowing employees to post on TikTok can be beneficial, it can also have drawbacks. For most employers, employees present the greatest risks for revealing negative or unflattering information. Sometimes employees' work-related social media posts can highlight trust issues in the workplace or a lack of redress options for employees. Employees who feel undervalued or unheard may turn to TikTok to find support and air their grievances. Some employees may resort to posting about their job because they have found traditional HR channels unhelpful or unsatisfactory. Additionally, employees may not feel safe bringing certain workplace issues or concerns to their employer, so they use TikTok as an outlet even if these actions violate their employers' social media policies. These posts can damage an organization's brand and reputation, leading to lost business, employee turnover and potential lawsuits.

Employers can reduce the likelihood of negative employee posts by identifying and addressing risks and negative workplace trends before they go public by communicating with employees frequently and conducting cultural assessment surveys. This can help employers identify what employees are concerned about and who raises those concerns. For example, an employer may learn that male employees feel more comfortable raising certain workplace concerns compared to female workers. Employers can use this information to update policies and implement training to create a safer, more supportive environment for all employees.

To reduce the risk that employee-sanctioned TikTok posts will injure or harm an employer's brand and reputation, employers can do the following:



Establish strong TikTok-related or general social media policies.



Educate and train employees on social media policies.



Cultivate strong and positive workplace culture.

Considering Privacy and Legal Issues

When establishing TikTok-related policies and guidelines, employers' most immediate concerns are privacy and confidentiality. By posting during the workday, employees frequently capture work-related moments by recording videos in offices, conference rooms and common spaces. These videos may record confidential information, such as trade secrets, customer or client names, audio from work meetings or information regarding products, services, systems and internal communications. Confidentiality and privacy concerns can also be triggered by remote workers posting while they work. An example of this would be a remote employee creating a TikTok video during a meeting or inadvertently capturing proprietary information from their computer monitors. Additionally, employers need to protect against cybersecurity threats and issues. Many employees may use their laptops and cellphones for work and personal use, and this is becoming increasingly common as more employers embrace remote work. This usage can present cybersecurity issues for organizations if employees are saving passwords on multiple devices.

Employers may want to consider how permitting employees to post on TikTok while at work could harm their organization's reputation. Some employees may post unflattering messages about their employers, such as complaints about working conditions or product liability issues. Employees may also discuss or show inappropriate or illegal activities, like being intoxicated. Not only can sharing this information on social media affect employers negatively and hurt their reputation, but it can also create legal issues, so it's critical that employers ensure their policies are consistent with all relevant and applicable employment and labor laws.

Monitoring Employees' TikTok Use at Work

It's not uncommon for employers to monitor electronic workplace communications on company-issued technology or devices, including emails or messaging applications, to prevent theft, assess employee productivity and safeguard resources. However, an employer's ability to monitor employees varies with federal and state laws as well as the nature of the surveillance. The increase in remote work and adoption of employee communication applications by many employers means more employees are socializing over company-owned electronic systems and potentially posting on social media using company-owned devices. This is raising questions about what employers can do to monitor workplace communications, including TikTok and other social media usage, and what, if anything, they should tell their employees about their monitoring.

Employers may disclose monitoring of employee email communications in their employee handbooks or electronic communication policies. However, when it comes to social media posts, such as those made using TikTok, employees may not be aware that employers are monitoring them. In some situations, employers must inform their workers that electronic communications are being monitored and obtain their consent. For example, the [Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986](#) prohibits employers from intentionally intercepting electronic communications unless they do so for business purposes or employees have provided prior consent. Sometimes, employers must provide employees with written notice before monitoring their electronic communications. Aside from legal concerns, monitoring employee communications and social media posts can negatively impact morale and satisfaction in the workplace. Due to state and local laws, employers may want to consult with local legal counsel before monitoring employee electronic communications, including TikTok posts.

Establishing TikTok-related Policies

With the influx of employees posting on TikTok about work or while at work, now is a good time for employers to revisit or establish social media policies and guidelines. Social media policies tend to separate the workplace from employees' personal lives. While employers can benefit from employees' on-the-job or job-related TikTok posts, it's important to understand that some TikTok posts may trigger potential legal and business concerns. An effective TikTok policy can protect the organization and be fair to employees. Employers can include TikTok-related policies as part of a general social media policy or create a standalone policy for the platform.

Like other employment policies, TikTok-related policies should be in writing and enforced consistently. A clearly written policy can ensure employees understand what behaviors are permitted on social media and decrease potential violations. Employers can prohibit behaviors on TikTok that would not be accepted or tolerated in the workplace, such as discrimination, harassment and bullying. A social media policy can also prohibit employees from creating TikTok videos at work or while in uniform or using a company email address for their TikTok or other social media accounts. Employers can use TikTok-related policies and guidelines to warn employees against posting content that embarrasses their organization or mocks customers. Encouraging employees to ask questions if they don't understand what's acceptable to post on TikTok can help decrease violations.

Employers can consider these common best practices when establishing a TikTok-related policy:

- Develop policies and guidelines in collaboration with legal counsel as well as HR, IT, communications and other teams.
- Use simple language and examples of content that should or should not post.
- Provide employees with a representative's contact information if they have any questions about the policy.

- Ensure the policy is consistent with applicable laws and regulations, including state and local laws (e.g., employees being allowed to discuss wages and working conditions under the National Labor Relations Act).
- Explain the consequences of violating the policy.
- Emphasize the importance of adhering to the organization's values and public image.
- Develop strategies for responding to policy violations consistently.
- Update and revise the policy often since social media platforms change quickly.

These guidelines can also be used to create a general social media policy that includes TikTok.

An organization's TikTok-related policy can be included in the employee handbook or distributed to employees as a standalone policy. Employers can explain their policy to employees during onboarding and through regular training; trained employees are less likely to share confidential information or content that may be considered defamatory or discriminatory on TikTok. By training employees regularly and informing them that they will be responsible for the consequences of their postings, employers can **reduce the risk of policy violations**.

Employers with existing social media policies can review them to determine whether they apply to platforms like TikTok. They can also confirm their anti-harassment policies cover both online and in-person bullying and discriminatory behaviors. Additionally, employers can inform employees that confidentiality, privacy and cybersecurity policies apply to the content they share or post on TikTok. If an employer allows certain employees to post approved content on the organization's behalf, they should consider establishing a separate policy for those posts. Employers also can create a style guide to accompany their social media policy for sponsored content that lists specific formats, topics and types of content that should or shouldn't be included.

Employer Takeaways

Social media is likely here to stay. As a result, the number of employees using platforms like TikTok is a reality that doesn't appear to be decreasing any time soon. As such, employers may want to consider adapting to this trend by developing and establishing policies that adequately protect their organization and reputation without alienating employees. By proactively and strategically approaching TikTok in the workplace, savvy employers may be able to protect their privacy and confidentiality, strengthen their brand and marketing, uncover and address workplace issues, and improve attraction and retention efforts.

Contact us today for more workplace resources.