

8.0 CERTIFICATION

I have read and I understand the Social Media Policy adopted by the Board of Judges on January 29, 2010

Employee's/User's Signature

Date

Print Name

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
for the
DISTRICT OF CONNECTICUT

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



Adopted by the Board of Judges on January 29, 2010

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT for the DISTRICT OF CONNECTICUT

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1.0 Overview

The Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees applies to all employees of the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut. There are several canons that all judicial employees must govern their actions by and, for the purpose of this policy, while using Social Media. They are as follows:

- Canon 1: A JUDICIAL EMPLOYEE SHOULD UPHOLD THE INTEGRITY AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY AND OF THE JUDICIAL EMPLOYEE'S OFFICE
- Canon 2: A JUDICIAL EMPLOYEE SHOULD AVOID IMPROPRIETY AND THE APPEARANCE OF IMPROPRIETY IN ALL ACTIVITIES
- Canon 3: A JUDICIAL EMPLOYEE SHOULD ADHERE TO APPROPRIATE STANDARDS IN PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF THE OFFICE
- Canon 4: IN ENGAGING IN OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES, A JUDICIAL EMPLOYEE SHOULD AVOID THE RISK OF CONFLICT WITH OFFICIAL DUTIES, SHOULD AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF IMPROPRIETY, AND SHOULD COMPLY WITH DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS
- Canon 5: A JUDICIAL EMPLOYEE SHOULD REFRAIN FROM INAPPROPRIATE POLITICAL ACTIVITY

2.0 Purpose

Created by the Judicial Conference of the United States, the purpose of the Code of Conduct is to impose certain ethical standards on all judicial employees. These ethical standards, whether directly or indirectly stated, are the basis for this Social Media policy set forth.

3.0 Scope

These guidelines are not exhaustive. They apply to all Court employees, with such exceptions as may be authorized by the Board of Judges, and apply while inside and outside the walls of each seat of court.

4.0 Policy

4.1 Social Media Applications

The birth and advance of "Web 2.0" technologies and applications in recent years has the potential to revolutionize how individuals, corporations, government agencies, and non-profit organizations interact and communicate with one another. Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of web design and software development, which places heavy emphasis on communication, collaboration, and sharing among internet users. Unlike the first generation of internet (Web 1.0), this change is grounded less in major technical transformations. Instead, this change is centered, chiefly, on the ways individuals use the Internet. Before Web 2.0, most Internet users were mainly consumers of information; now, these new technologies and applications allow users to be both producers and consumers of information and shift easily between those roles.

Many of these Web 2.0 applications, often called “social media,” are central parts of many people’s daily computer usage. Users, whether they be institutions or individuals, connect and communicate through social networking internet sites; collaborate on, refine, and disseminate knowledge through wikis; share their perspective through blogs and microblogs; upload still and video images through videosharing and photosharing sites; broadcast via podcasts and vodcasts; and stay connected via RSS feeds beamed to e-mail inboxes or displayed on smartphones.

As Web 2.0 has made communication instantaneous and allowed for greater collaboration and information sharing, there has been some downside. Many users adopting Web 2.0 seem less concerned, or at least mindful, of privacy and confidentiality as they navigate social media sites such as Facebook. Recent news stories illustrate the privacy and confidentiality concerns generated by the expansion of social media internet usage: employment opportunities lost because of Facebook profiles; scandal precipitated by YouTube or Flickr postings, and judicial proceedings compromised by jurors’ Twitter postings.

The challenges and risks of this social media environment, though, are particularly acute for government employees who work in positions where discretion and confidentiality are imperative. Court employees work in such an environment. Court personnel are expected to keep sensitive information confidential, exercise discretion to avoid embarrassment to the Court, and take precautions to avoid unnecessary security risks for court personnel, including the judges they serve.

The Court has set down a series of broad guidelines for employees to consider as they navigate these new, and ever changing, technologies and applications.

1. **Think before you post.** Internet postings—whether they be text, photos, videos, or audio—remain accessible long after they are forgotten by the user. Beyond that, remember that nothing is “private” on the Internet despite people’s best efforts to keep things private. Do not post anything on the Internet that you would not want to read on the front page of the New York Times.
2. **Speak for yourself, not your institution.** On social networking sites, many individuals list their occupations and/or places of employment. Considering the sensitive nature of the work that we do, Court employees should refrain from listing their place of employment on a social networking website. Also, remember that you are a representative of the Court and should conduct yourself in a way to avoid bringing embarrassment upon yourself and the Court. In the age of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, many often do not think through the implications of what they post. Users often believe that their postings are private because of a social networking website’s privacy features or that their comments are untraceable because they were made under a screen name, but this information may not be private and could cause damage to your reputation and the Court’s if it becomes public. As such, Court employees should abide by a simple rule: if you are not speaking to someone directly or over a secure landline, you must assume that anything you say or write is available for public consumption.

3. **Keep secrets secret.** Make sure to abide by all of the Court's confidentiality and disclosure provisions. Court employees handle confidential and sensitive information and the restrictions that employees normally observe in the performance of their day-to-day duties should also apply to their use of social media. Just as court employees are prohibited from disclosing sensitive, non-public information to the media and general public in person or over the phone, the same applies to social media. Furthermore, Court employees should refrain from discussing any of the Court's internal processes and procedures, whether they are of a non-confidential or confidential nature.
4. **Remember the Guide.** Any public postings are governed by the Judiciary's Guide to Policies and Procedures. As Judiciary employees, we are expected to avoid impropriety and conduct ourselves in a manner that does not detract from the dignity and independence of the judicial system. As such, Judiciary employees are restricted from engaging in partisan political activity and fundraising activities that could compromise judicial independence. Please keep these policies and procedures in mind as you participate on social media sites.
5. **Observe security protocol.** Court employees must also take care to avoid doing things that would compromise the security of the courthouse and personnel. To maintain security, do not post pictures of the courthouse, inside or outside; do not post pictures of court events and do not post pictures of the Court's judicial officers. Also, be careful when disclosing your place of employment: social media sites are notoriously unsecure environments and knowledge of your place of employment could place employees in situations where pressure could be applied on them to corrupt the integrity of the judicial process.

5.0 Enforcement

Any employee who violates this policy will be subject to the full range of disciplinary actions, up to and including termination.

6.0 Definitions

Blogs - Internet sites where users can read and/or post information or opinions about a specific topic

Chat rooms - electronic forums where users can visit and exchange views and opinions about a variety of issues

Peer-to-Peer file sharing - an application that runs on a personal computer and shares files with other users across the internet

Podcast - An audio broadcast available for downloading from a website to a personal computer or other device

Vodcast - A video broadcast available for downloading from a website to a personal computer or other device

Web Browser - Software to navigate the Internet (e.g., Microsoft Internet Explorer/Mozilla Firefox)

Wiki - A collaborative website which can be directly edited by anyone with access to it

7.0 Revision History

This policy may be amended at any time by the Board of Judges.

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