

“The Importance of Setting the Rules with Social Media”

The Australian federal LNP party has cracked down on their party candidates using social media sites because they can't control the content that their members are posting on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The plan by the federal arm of the party is to provide their candidates with party monitored fan pages so that any inappropriate content can be filtered or removed.

Social network sites are just that, social, they allow the owners of the pages to post comment or content on any subject they want without censorship or control, and it is these last two that get most small businesses in trouble. The LNP's decision is to me, closing the stable door after the horse has well and truly bolted.

The policies and procedures on how the party and its public office members interact with social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter, should have been put in place a long time ago and the party should have employed a well thought out strategy to do just this.

Trying to censor their member's use of these network sites after they've been allowed to have a free reign is going to be very difficult for them, as it seems it is now, with several of their high profile politicians defying the ruling and some asking for exemptions. Wouldn't it have been so easy to put these rules in place before they started on social media? I think so.

I know from talking to so many business owners their greatest fears in using social media are the lack of privacy, and control over the content that is published about their business.

Setting up your policies and procedures manual and creating the rules around who will manage, monitor and administer your online social media strategy should be one of the first strategies implemented.

No point in following the LNP and doing it after the event.

Once the rules have been put in place it is a lot easier to monitor the content, what is posted on sites and how to engage your community to build loyalty for your business. Remember though, social media is about openness and engaging your community in your business, censoring the information you post on sites to the point of being down right boring, will not help you in tapping into the online social media community.

Social media has a very large voice, and you need to make sure the message you are shouting about is the one you really want your customers to know about, so before you start getting too deep into your Facebook page or your Twitter account, make sure you know what the rules of engagement are.

Make sure that all staff that are part of your online strategy are trained on what is acceptable content and what is not, before they get access to your sites.

Setting the rules early will help you control the very powerful tool social media is and will also allow you to breathe a little easier.

Remember, set up the rules before you start, trying to do it after the damage has been done can be a very costly mistake for you and your business.

Author Mike Andrew is a technology consultant to small business and operates a web consultancy that covers areas such SEO, social media strategy and Internet marketing.

You can visit Mike's web site on social media more information at <http://www.mikeandrewconsulting.com>