

# IBM Social Computing Guidelines

*Blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds and social media*

In the spring of 2005, IBMers used a wiki to create a set of guidelines for all IBMers who wanted to blog. These guidelines aimed to provide helpful, practical advice—and also to protect both IBM bloggers and IBM itself, as the company sought to embrace the blogosphere. Since then, many new forms of social media have emerged. So we turned to IBMers again to re-examine our guidelines and determine what needed to be modified. The effort has broadened the scope of the existing guidelines to include all forms of social computing.

Below are the current and official "IBM Social Computing Guidelines," which continue to evolve as new technologies and social networking tools become available.

Have you seen social computing behavior or content that is not in keeping with these guidelines? [Report inappropriate content via e-mail.](#)

## Introduction

### **Responsible engagement in innovation and dialogue**

Whether or not an IBMer chooses to create or participate in a blog, wiki, online social network or any other form of online publishing or discussion is his or her own decision. However, emerging online collaboration platforms are fundamentally changing the way IBMers work and engage with each other, clients and partners.

IBM is increasingly exploring how online discourse through social computing can empower IBMers as global professionals, innovators and citizens. These individual interactions represent a new model: not mass communications, but masses of communicators.

Therefore, it is very much in IBM's interest—and, we believe, in each IBMer's own—to be aware of and participate in this sphere of information, interaction and idea exchange:

**To learn:** As an innovation-based company, we believe in the importance of open exchange and learning—between IBM and its clients, and among the many constituents of our emerging business and societal ecosystem. The rapidly growing phenomenon of user-generated web content—blogging, social web-applications and networking—are emerging important arenas for that kind of engagement and learning.

**To contribute:** IBM—as a business, as an innovator and as a corporate citizen—makes important contributions to the world, to the future of business and technology, and to public dialogue on a broad range of societal issues. As our business activities increasingly focus on the provision of transformational insight and high-value innovation - whether to business clients or those in the public, educational or health sectors—it becomes increasingly important for IBM and IBMers to share with the world the exciting things we're learning and doing, and to learn from others.

In 1997, IBM recommended that its employees get out onto the Internet—at a time when many companies were seeking to restrict their employees' Internet access. In 2005, the company made a strategic decision to embrace the blogosphere and to encourage IBMers to participate. We continue to advocate IBMers' responsible involvement today in this rapidly growing space of relationship, learning and collaboration.

## IBM Social Computing Guidelines: Executive Summary

1. Know and follow IBM's [Business Conduct Guidelines](#).
2. IBMers are personally responsible for the content they publish on blogs, wikis or any other form of user-generated media. Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time—protect your privacy.
3. Identify yourself—name and, when relevant, role at IBM—when you discuss IBM or IBM-related matters. And write in the first person. You must make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of IBM.
4. If you publish content to any website outside of IBM and it has something to do with work you do or subjects associated with IBM, use a disclaimer such as this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent IBM's positions, strategies or opinions."
5. Respect copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws.
6. Don't provide IBM's or another's confidential or other proprietary information. Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal to IBM.
7. Don't cite or reference clients, partners or suppliers without their approval. When you do make a reference, where possible link back to the source.
8. Respect your audience. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in IBM's workplace. You should also show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory—such as politics and religion.
9. Find out who else is blogging or publishing on the topic, and cite them.
10. Be aware of your association with IBM in online social networks. If you identify yourself as an IBMer, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and clients.
11. Don't pick fights, be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so.
12. Try to add value. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. IBM's brand is best represented by its people and what you publish may reflect on IBM's brand.

## IBM Social Computing Guidelines: Detailed Discussion

### **The IBM Business Conduct Guidelines and laws provide the foundation for IBM's policies and guidelines for blogs and social computing.**

The same principles and guidelines that apply to IBMers' activities in general, as found in the IBM Business Conduct Guidelines, apply to IBMers' activities online. This includes forms of online publishing and discussion, including blogs, wikis, file-sharing, user-generated video and audio, [virtual worlds](#)\* and social networks.

As outlined in the Business Conduct Guidelines, IBM fully respects the legal rights of our employees in all countries in which we operate. In general, what you do on your own time is your affair. However, activities in or outside of work that affect your IBM job performance, the performance of others, or IBM's business interests are a proper focus for company policy.

### **IBM supports open dialogue and the exchange of ideas.**

IBM regards blogs and other forms of online discourse as primarily a form of communication and relationship among individuals. When the company wishes to communicate publicly as a company—whether to the marketplace or to the general public—it has well established means to

do so. Only those officially designated by IBM have the authorization to speak on behalf of the company.

However, IBM believes in dialogue among IBMers and with our partners, clients, members of the many communities in which we participate and the general public. Such dialogue is inherent in our business model of innovation, and in our commitment to the development of open standards. We believe that IBMers can both derive and provide important benefits from exchanges of perspective.

One of IBMers' core values is "trust and personal responsibility in all relationships." As a company, IBM trusts—and expects—IBMers to exercise personal responsibility whenever they participate in social media. This includes not violating the trust of those with whom they are engaging. IBMers should not use these media for covert marketing or public relations. If and when members of IBM's Communications, Marketing, Sales or other functions engaged in advocacy for the company have the authorization to participate in social media, they should identify themselves as such.

What does an IBMer's personal responsibility mean in online social media activities? Online social media enables individuals to share their insights, express their opinions and share information within the context of a globally distributed conversation. Each tool and medium has proper and improper uses. While IBM encourages all of its employees to join a global conversation, it is important for IBMers who choose to do so to understand what is recommended, expected and required when they discuss IBM-related topics, whether at work or on their own time.

**Know the IBM Business Conduct Guidelines.** If you have any confusion about whether you ought to publish something online, chances are the BCGs will resolve it. Pay particular attention to what the BCGs have to say about proprietary information, about avoiding misrepresentation and about competing in the field. If, after checking the BCG's, you are still unclear as to the propriety of a post, it is best to refrain and seek the advice of management.

**Be who you are.** Some bloggers work anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names. IBM discourages that in blogs, wikis or other forms of online participation that relate to IBM, our business or issues with which the company is engaged. We believe in transparency and honesty. If you are blogging about your work for IBM, we encourage you to use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify that you work for IBM. Nothing gains you more notice in the online social media environment than honesty—or dishonesty. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. But also be smart about protecting yourself and your privacy. What you publish will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully and also be judicious in disclosing personal details.

**Be thoughtful about how you present yourself in online social networks.** The lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred in online social networks. By virtue of identifying yourself as an IBMer within a social network, you are now connected to your colleagues, managers and even IBM's clients. You should ensure that content associated with you is consistent with your work at IBM. If you have joined IBM recently, be sure to update your social profiles to reflect IBM's guidelines.

**Speak in the first person.** Use your own voice; bring your own personality to the forefront; say what is on your mind.

**Use a disclaimer.** Whether you publish to a blog or some other form of social media, make it clear that what you say there is representative of your views and opinions and not necessarily the views and opinions of IBM. At a minimum in your own blog, you should include the following standard disclaimer: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent IBM's positions, strategies or opinions."

**Managers and executives take note:** This standard disclaimer does not by itself exempt IBM managers and executives from a special responsibility when blogging. By virtue of their position, they must consider whether personal thoughts they publish may be misunderstood as expressing IBM positions. And a manager should assume that his or her team will read what is written. A public blog is not the place to communicate IBM policies to IBM employees.

**Respect copyright and fair use laws.** For IBM's protection and well as your own, it is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others, including IBM's own copyrights and brands. You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work. And it is good general blogging practice to link to others' work. Keep in mind that laws will be different depending on where you live and work.

**Protecting confidential and proprietary information.** Social computing blurs many of the traditional boundaries between internal and external communications. Be thoughtful about what you publish—particularly on external platforms. You must make sure you do not disclose or use IBM confidential or proprietary information or that of any other person or company in any online social computing platform. For example, ask permission before posting someone's picture in a social network or publishing in a blog a conversation that was meant to be private.

**IBM's business performance.** You must not comment on confidential IBM financial information such as IBM's future business performance, business plans, or prospects anywhere in world. This includes statements about an upcoming quarter or future periods or information about alliances, and applies to anyone including conversations with Wall Street analysts, press or other third parties (including friends). IBM policy is not to comment on rumors in any way. You should merely say, "no comment" to rumors. Do not deny or affirm them—or suggest either denial or affirmation in subtle ways.

**Protect IBM's clients, business partners and suppliers.** Clients, partners or suppliers should not be cited or obviously referenced without their approval. Externally, never identify a client, partner or supplier by name without permission and never discuss confidential details of a client engagement. Internal social computing platforms permit suppliers and business partners to participate so be sensitive to who will see your content. If a client hasn't given explicit permission for their name to be used, think carefully about the content you're going to publish on any internal social media and get the appropriate permission where necessary. It is acceptable to discuss general details about kinds of projects and to use non-identifying pseudonyms for a client (e.g., Client 123) so long as the information provided does not make it easy for someone to identify the client or violate any non-disclosure or intellectual property

agreements that may be in place with the client. Furthermore, your blog or online social network is not the place to conduct confidential business with a client.

**Respect your audience and your coworkers.** Remember that IBM is a global organization whose employees and clients reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Don't be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory—such as politics and religion. For example, if your blog is hosted on an IBM-owned property, avoid these topics and focus on subjects that are business-related. If your blog is self-hosted, use your best judgment and be sure to make it clear that the views and opinions expressed are yours alone and do not represent the official views of IBM. Further, blogs, wikis, virtual worlds, social networks, or other tools hosted outside of IBM's protected Intranet environment should not be used for internal communications among fellow employees. It is fine for IBMers to disagree, but please don't use your external blog or other online social media to air your differences in an inappropriate manner.

**Add value.** IBM's brand is best represented by its people and everything you publish reflects upon it. Blogs and social networks that are hosted on IBM-owned domains should be used in a way that adds value to IBM's business. If it helps you, your coworkers, our clients or our partners to do their jobs and solve problems; if it helps to improve knowledge or skills; if it contributes directly or indirectly to the improvement of IBM's products, processes and policies; if it builds a sense of community; or if it helps to promote IBM's Values, then it is adding value. Though not directly business-related, background information you choose to share about yourself, such as information about your family or personal interests, may be useful in helping establish a relationship between you and your readers, but it is entirely your choice whether to share this information.

**Don't pick fights.** When you see misrepresentations made about IBM by media, analysts or by other bloggers, you may certainly use your blog—or join someone else's—to point that out. Always do so with respect, stick to the facts and identify your appropriate affiliation to IBM. Also, if you speak about a competitor, you must make sure that what you say is factual and that it does not disparage the competitor. Avoid unnecessary or unproductive arguments. Brawls may earn traffic, but nobody wins in the end. Don't try to settle scores or goad competitors or others into inflammatory debates. Here and in other areas of public discussion, make sure that what you are saying is factually correct.

**Be the first to respond to your own mistakes.** If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. In a blog, if you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so.

**Use your best judgment.** Remember that there are always consequences to what you publish. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, review the suggestions above and think about why that is. If you're still unsure, and it is related to IBM business, feel free to discuss it with your manager. Ultimately, however, you have sole responsibility for what you post to your blog or publish in any form of online social media.

**Don't forget your day job.** You should make sure that your online activities do not interfere with your job or commitments to customers.

\*Virtual worlds present a number of unique circumstances, not all of which are covered in these guidelines. Please refer to the companion, ["Virtual worlds Guidelines"](#) for additional guidelines around identity, behavior, appearance and intellectual property.