



Craig Pratt & Associates, Inc.

IN THE NEWS...

CASE STUDY: Employee Handbook For The Future

B A C K G R O U N D

In October 2002, Gwen Minor, Yahoo! Inc.'s HR Manager, had an employee policy problem: she needed to revise Yahoo!'s Employee Handbook before the end of the year. Her problem was threefold: the existing handbook needed to be updated with the latest employee legislative and compliance information, it required the addition of approximately 25% new material (while removing 20% outdated text), and ultimately had to migrate from a print format to an online version.

The content issues and tight timeline, combined with the call for an HR professional familiar with the latest employee legislative and compliance issues, led Minor to Craig Pratt.

Pratt was recommended by Yahoo!'s legal team as a knowledgeable HR consultant who also possessed strong writing skills – an unusual but compelling combination for this project. "Besides Craig's experience with the policy side of HR compliance issues, I felt he was philosophically aligned with Yahoo!, could work well within the different levels of the company, and had access to current examples of legislatively accurate, best practice policy examples," says Minor.

Yahoo! has a strong company culture of entrepreneurialism, independent leadership and a sense of fun that needed to guide the spirit and intent of the Employee Handbook. "Besides providing the latest in legislative and regulatory information, by giving the user what he or she needs to know at any given time, the Handbook is designed to develop a culture of independent decision-makers," states Minor.

Revising the Yahoo! Employee Handbook depended upon the contribution of subject matter experts in various company departments. Minor was concerned about giving the experts in each area the room to be expressive while at the same time creating a consistent "tone, look and feel" to the Handbook.

She adds, "We wanted to provide all the information our staff needs, not only in the regulatory realm, but also regarding jobs within the company, security issues, travel and financial information, and more. We wanted to create a place for everyone to go to get answers to their questions so they can make the best decision in a given situation, and to encourage exemplary performance."

Pratt's background in the legal aspects of HR, his experience with writing employee handbooks, and his ability to deliver within the six-week timeline made him a natural partner for the project.

S O L U T I O N

Pratt started with the existing 60+-page handbook and broke it down into 50 clear, manageable files with names of staff and "review by" dates. Each file contained the original language from the Handbook, Pratt's input and issues for Yahoo!'s content experts to consider in their contributions to the updated version, and a space for each author to respond.

Pratt also developed a tracking system for each file by creating a spreadsheet that listed the files, containing a schedule with names and dates. This provided an easy way for Minor and Pratt to track the revision process, to handle the large amount of information, and to include all the participants.

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R E S U L T

By eliminating redundant material and streamlining the text, Pratt and Minor managed to shorten the Handbook, while adding 15-20% *more* material on company policy – within a six-week timeframe. Pratt comments, “By tightening up the Handbook’s policies on compliance, it gives a structure to HR issues that will help protect the company and its employees. Yahoo!’s unique corporate personality needed to be preserved without creating confusion or leaving managers and employees with an insufficient structure to guide their workplace behaviors. When the guidelines are in writing, employees and managers know what they need to do, and team members of all levels can refer to the Handbook for answers to questions about company policy and compliance-related issues.”

The revised Employee Handbook can easily be updated with new features and information. As an online tool, it will include links to useful internal and external resources for Yahoo!’s geographically dispersed employees, including local governmental sites and emergency services.

With Yahoo!’s guidelines clearly laid out, and employee resources of all kinds available at the click of a mouse, Pratt and Minor have created an Employee Handbook that will be an invaluable employee tool, both now and in the future.

A B O U T Y A H O O !

Yahoo! has come a long way since its inception in 1994 by co-founders Jerry Yang and David Filo. Started as a method to keep track of their personal interests on the Internet, Yang and Filo developed customized software that allowed them to create a guide to help users “efficiently locate, identify and edit material stored on the Internet.”

Yahoo!’s employees number over 3000 worldwide, located in offices in Europe, the Asia Pacific, Latin America, Canada and the United States, with headquarters in Santa Clara, California.

The company works hard to maintain its culture of entrepreneurial brio and independent thinking for all of its employees, also known as *Yahoos!*. “Yahoos! are committed to defining the future of the Internet, their customers, creating user-friendly products and services, constantly making Yahoo! better, and giving back to the community, their work, and of course Yahoo!”

A B O U T C R A I G P R A T T

Craig Pratt is a human resources consultant specializing in HR management policy, procedure and practice, and is the principal owner of web-based consulting firm hrdocument.com.

He holds the Senior Human Resources Professional (SPHR) certification given by the Human Resources Certification Institute. His practice includes tailored employee policy development, management training, fair employment practices, and resolution of problem employee situations. He provides trial-qualified expert testimony and fact-finding services in large-scale, in-depth investigations of discrimination, harassment, and hostile work environment complaints.

Craig frequently testifies in court as an expert witness on behalf of plaintiffs and defendants. He participated as an expert in the landmark sexual harassment case, *Ellison v. Brady*. With co-author Amy Oppenheimer, Craig recently published a book: *Conducting Workplace Harassment Investigations: How to Be Fair, Thorough and Legal* through the publishing department of the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM).