Unions and Technology

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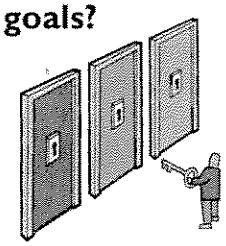
Every day, new applications of technology are being developed, that claim to revolutionize communication. As a local union, how do you decide which communication methods will best help your local union meet its goals?

- Websites
- E-Newsletters
- YouTube
- Flickr
- GetActive
- Online Groups
- Webinars
- Conference Calling
- Robocalls
- Blogs
- Twitter
- SMS Messaging
- MySpace
- Facebook
- Survey Monkey



1. Think about your local union's goals. What are your current and upcoming priorities? Who is the target audience for your communication efforts?

- Educate bargaining unit members about legal and contractual rights at work
- Organize bargaining unit members to join the union and participate in union activities
- Recruit potential leaders: stewards, officers, issue-based committee volunteers
- Persuade managers to negotiate contract gains and follow the terms of the agreement
- Elect political candidates who support labor issues, and lobby for pro-worker legislation
- Convince media outlets to publicize your struggles and victories
- Create alliances with community groups on issues affecting your members and the community

2. Fundamentals first: a strong one-on-one communication network is still the single most effective approach for conducting education and mobilization.

This cannot be emphasized enough: one-on-one conversations between union members and their co-workers are the ideal form of communication, even in a high-tech age. Union stewards and other shop-floor leaders are best equipped to hear and understand the issues their co-workers are about, talk about the union in ways that are meaningful to their co-workers, and persuade them to participate. Studies of effective union organizing and orientation methods confirm this common-sense principle.

3. What obstacles does your union face in its efforts to communicate with members? Can technology help overcome some of those obstacles?

The most common obstacle local unions face in communication and organizing is simply staying on top of basic information about their members and potential members: their work status, department, shift, union membership status, addresses and phone numbers, and current email address. This is an area where technology can help immensely—understanding basic database functions can save many hours of wasted time and make union outreach efforts much more effective.

If you belong to a statewide or regional local union, online meetings, discussion groups, blogs, listserv and email updates can fill the gaps when meetings are less frequent due to travel time and costs. But remember—online forums are no *substitute* for face-to-face meetings, particularly when difficult decisions need to be made.

There may also be times when communication is necessary but only possible through technology. Some unions use text messages for urgent updates from the bargaining team to the membership.

4. Avoid re-inventing the wheel. Find out what kinds of communication technology your target audience is already frequently using.

How "computer savvy" is your target audience? Are most of your co-workers already online? Do they commonly use Blackberries and iPhones, or mostly basic cell phones? Do they regularly send and receive text messages? Are they already linking up and sharing news or pictures via FaceBook? Are they already participating in Google groups? You can avoid a difficult recruitment process and have better results if you focus on forms of communication that are already familiar to your members.

5. How much time and money will your union realistically be able to devote to developing, updating, and coordinating your communication strategy?

As most local unions know well, even consistently producing a quarterly newsletter can be a big time commitment. The appeal of online communication strategies—that information can be widely disseminated instantly, with the click of a mouse—is also a serious challenge. Online information becomes "old news" very quickly; websites, blogs, and social networks need to be updated frequently in order to keep people's attention. You will need at least one member who is willing to devote significant time to coordinating and maintaining each form of communication you choose to use.

Also, while some web-based forms of communication are now free or available at a relatively low cost, be sure to consider all potential costs associated with software and equipment you may need for each form of online communication.

Example: Use of Video and You Tube Technology in a Local Union Contract Struggle

Last year, 185 school paraprofessionals in Wallingford, Connecticut prepared for what promised to be a difficult contract struggle. The workers, who had never before received health insurance benefits from the school district, made winning health insurance a top priority for their 2008 negotiations.

The union, sub-local 75 of UE Local 222, began preparing for the struggle a year before the contract expired. While the foundation of the union's preparation rested on traditional internal organizing strategies, such as lunchtime meetings at each school in the district, the union also boosted its efforts with a YouTube video.

Local videographers from a health care advocacy group agreed to produce a video based on interviews with union members who did not have health insurance, to show how that was affecting them and their families. The video was then distributed to elected officials, posted on YouTube, and circulated widely. The video raised the level of media interest in the struggle— one local newspaper ran the YouTube video link on its front page, and the local community channel aired the video frequently.

Publicizing workers' stories, in their own words, in combination with petitions, a community forum, pickets, and letters to the editor helped the paraprofessionals win a strong contract. In addition to health insurance, workers won annual raises, a new paid holiday, increases in longevity pay and life insurance, and improved safety and leave language.

The Foundation of Any Successful Union Communication Plan: Information that is Accurate, Up-To-Date, and Accessible

Does your local maintain a database of all bargaining unit members, that is updated regularly with accurate information including: new employees; employees who no longer work in your bargaining unit; member status; each employee's address, phone number, and email; and shift and department information? If not, that should be your first priority!

Effective communication strategies must ensure that the message will reach its target audience. If you begin a communication plan based on e-mail, knowing that you only have a small percentage of your members' email addresses, you are venturing into dangerous waters. Members who do not receive the updates could feel offended and miss important information, a portion of the e-mail addresses you do have will no longer be active, and some members won't check their e-mail or read the message.

There are many times when communication needs to be targeted to a specific sub-group within your bargaining unit. For example, research shows that the more quickly you identify and communicate with new employees, the more likely they are to become involved members of your organization. If a grievance or potential bargaining issue is affecting workers in a certain building or job description, your ability to ensure that a message reaches these specific workers can influence the outcome (ex: the amount of information and member support the union brings to negotiations).

By regularly reviewing accurate trends within your bargaining unit, you can identify and correct potential problems and weaknesses before they become worse. For example, if you regularly review lists of members/non-members, sorted by department and shift, or job description, it will become clear which departments or job categories need special organizing attention. If you have a large bargaining unit, reviewing a list of workers involved in grievances, sorted by department, shift, and/or job title may show trends you had overlooked.

If you are updating information through several different systems, at best you are duplicating your efforts as you transfer data from one place to another...at worst you are losing important data. As technology changed over the past 15 years, many organizations have found themselves with separate, duplicated data systems. For example, the membership database may not be integrated with the e-mail system. Grievance information is often kept separately from membership databases. Information that is updated in one place is often not updated in others.

Current technology can make maintaining information and producing lists and reports much easier than it was in the past. You do not need to be a computer whiz to maintain a simple database, and produce sorted and selected lists. The main software packages like Microsoft Access and Filemaker Pro are easy to learn and come with pre-designed templates that you might already be able to use. There are also dozens of other options, available at a range of prices and technological difficulty.

Tips to Consider When Shopping for Databases

Involve Staff, Officers, Members in Considering Your Organization's Needs

- What information will you track in your database?
- What kinds of reports will you want or need to generate? (phone bank lists, mailing labels, membership reports, etc)
- What existing information systems do you use, and how easy will it be to convert them to, or coordinate them with, your database? (ex: Excel spreadsheets, e-mail listserv)
- How are your needs likely to change in the coming years?
- Who will be working with the database, how often, how will they access it (are they in the same office, or spread across the state), and what is their level of tech experience?

Research the Product Carefully, and Consider the Following Questions:

- How user-friendly is the software?
- Is the software already programmed to perform the functions your organization will need?
- Is it compatible with other systems you use?
- If the software is relatively new, are all the kinks worked out? There are several websites that review technology for non-profit organizations, and have reports on software, such as: www.idealware.org
- What will be the total costs involved, including software, any customized programming, developing training materials for staff, and providing support and updates? If you hire someone to build a customized database, it is particularly important to consider these costs, as well as the potential cost of updating it or converting it to another system as technology changes.
- If you are considering an online database, be sure you understand the fee structure (may be based on monthly rent and/or usage fees), consider how to back up your information (what would happen if the vendor went out of business), find out about down-time for maintenance, the impact of automatic software updates, the details of how information can be imported and exported, and the vendor's security measures. *Idealware, "The Truth About Hosted Software Packages," November 2008*

Setting up A Simple Database

Using Microsoft Access 2007 as an example, here are the steps to setting up a very basic database table. Databases like Access have the capacity to connect information in various tables into one report or information query, but this guide will focus on learning to use one table.

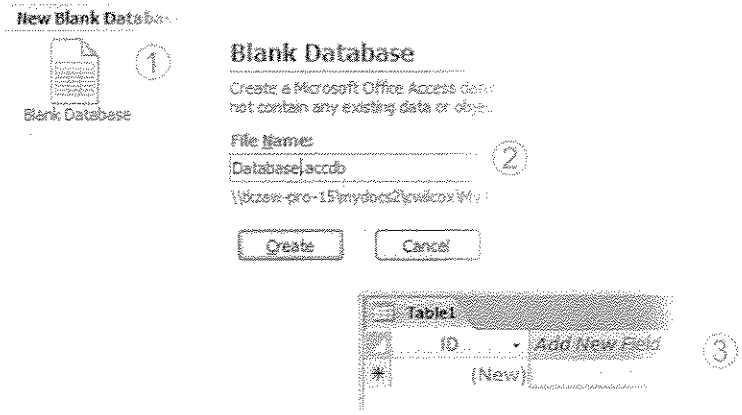
1. Determine which "fields," or categories of information, you will need to include in the database, and consistent results to enter in each field.

- Common union fields include: Employee ID, First Name, Last Name, Address I (number and street), Address II (P.O.Box), City, State, Zip, Home Phone, Cell Phone, Email Address, Date of Hire, Union Member, Shift, Department, Job Title, etc.
- Choose field names that are easily understood by any potential user (LastName rather than LN)
- Create rules about what words or numbers will be added as data under each field. Keep it simple and consistent, so it is easy to enter, and easy to sort. *Ex: Under the Member column, agree that all data entry will use "Y" or "N"....***or** *only a membership date "12/12/02". Do not let some people enter "Yes" while others enter "Y" and "12/12/02" and "Nov 5, 2007" - it will become difficult or impossible to search with inconsistent data in the same field.*
- Don't clump together data that you may need to sort separately. *For example, many people write notations in the Address field when a bad address turns up. However, if you want to run a list of all members with bad addresses that need to be corrected, having inconsistent notes written in the Address field makes it difficult to create that list. Instead, you could create a separate field called Bad Address, put the wrong address in the Bad Address field, and empty the Address field. It is easy to create a list of all workers with a blank address field, and saving the address in a different field prevents you from re-entering the wrong address later.*

2. Open Microsoft Access and Click "New Blank Database," then Name Your Database and Click "Create".

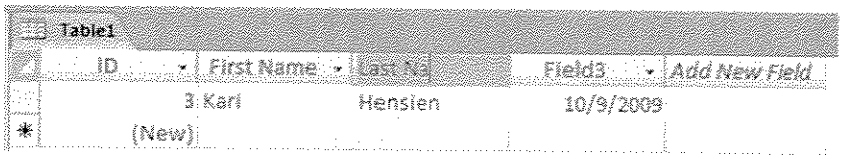
You can accept the default name, or name the database.

A window will open with a table like the one in the lower right hand corner of the picture below.



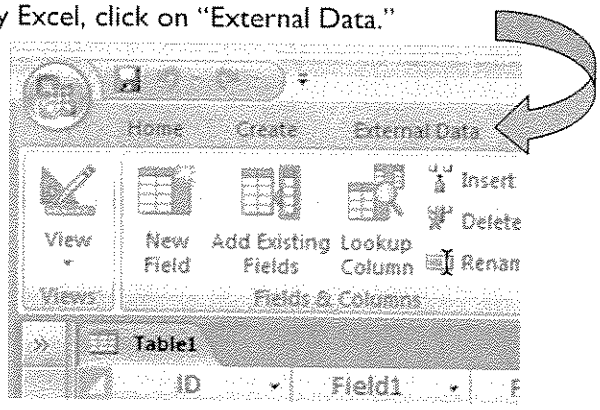
All Microsoft Access photos used in this manual come from the Microsoft website's downloadable training presentations on Access 2007.

3. Begin Entering Data or Import Data from Another Source



- If you are entering information from scratch (versus importing data from another source), it is very easy to get started. Double-click on the column headings and type in names. Each row will be a "record", for example all the information connected to one member. Just click on each box to enter the appropriate information.

- If you are importing data from a spreadsheet, let's say Excel, click on "External Data." Buttons representing different programs, including Excel, will appear. In this example, you would click on the Excel button. A window will appear that asks where the spreadsheet is located on your computer. Click the "browse" button, find the file, and click "ok."

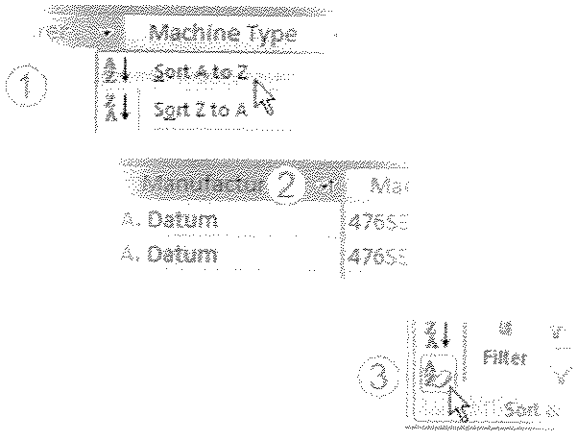


An Import Spreadsheet Wizard window will walk you through the steps. It will ask you to confirm which sheet the information is on, whether the first row contains column headings, what name and type of data should be included in each column, and whether Access should create a primary key for you (a unique number for each record—answer is generally yes). A new table will appear in your database, with the default name, or the name you have chosen.

- You can also cut and paste data into your table from another table or spreadsheet.

Sorting, Filtering, and Searching Information in Your Table

- **Simple data sorts:** click on the arrow on the right side of the column header for the information you wish to sort. A window will pop up, asking you which sort order (1). Just highlight the one you want, and it will sort all the information alphabetically based on that column. You can always undo a sort (Click on the Home Tab, and then the A-Z eraser icon in the "Sort and Filter" section (3).)



Sorting, Filtering, and Searching, *continued*

- **Simple data filters:** just like the sorting example above, click on the arrow on the right side of the column header for the information you wish to filter. A window will appear with sort options at the top, and filter options below.

You can select a certain value—for example, a list of all union members might mean filtering records with a "Y" in the Member column. Or, you can select a range of values—for example, new employees who started working in the past 6 months. To do that, you would choose the filter option that said "date filters" and choose records before January 4, 2009.

The table would then only show you records that match the criteria of your filter. You can easily undo a filter using the same method (click on arrow at right of column header) and click the "clear filter" option.

- **Searching for all or part of a word**: Use the search box at the bottom of the table.

Queries—Creating Lasting Filters, Sorts, and More

There are certain lists you will use regularly. For example, you may regularly want an updated list of all non-members, sorted by Department, Shift, and Last Name. That is a good example of a "query" that you can create and save. The information in the query will change as the table is updated, but it will always look for the same criteria you have established. The following instructions can help you create a simple query, using information from only one data table.

1. Click on "Create," then click the button called "Query Design."

2. A window will appear, asking you to select the table your information will come from.

3. You will see a box listing all the fields in your table above, and a blank query below. Double click on each field from the box that you want to see in the query, in the order you want them sorted (ex: department, shift, member status, last name…) The name of each field will appear in the query, followed by the name of the table the information comes from.

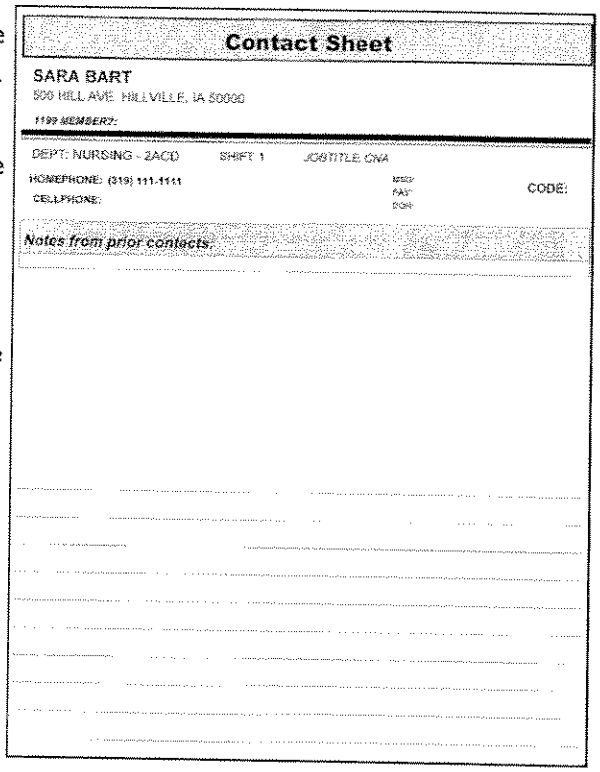
4. Click on the sort bar to sort certain fields (alphabetically, ascending or descending). Click on the criteria bar and enter any filters you want on data (ex: "Y" under Member field to see only members). If you want to choose all records that are blank in a certain field, you type "Is Null" in the criteria field. If you want all records that are not blank (for example, you want to pull all names without addresses in order to print mailing labels), you type "Is Not Null" in the criteria field.

5. To run the query, click "Design" and "Run." A table with your criteria should appear.

Other Database Functions

- **Mailing labels:** you can easily create mailing labels based on your full table, or any query you have created. Just open the table or query you want to use, and click "Create", then "Labels" in the Reports group. A "Label Wizard" will walk you through the steps of choosing the right size labels, the right font, and any sort preferences you have for the labels.

- **Member Contact or Housecall Sheets**: it can be extremely helpful in internal organizing or political door-knocking efforts to print contact sheets for each targeted member. In addition, you can link your database information to mapping programs like "Streets and Trips" to produce maps and routes for visiting the specific co-workers you have selected.


Contact Sheet

SARA BART
500 HILL AVE HILLVILLE, IA 50000
1199 MEMBER?:

DEPT: NURSING - 2ACD SHIFT: 1 JOBTITLE: CNA
HOMEPHONE: (319) 111-1111 CODE:
CELLPHONE:

Notes from prior contacts:

However, the set-up phase is tricky, because none of the existing templates that come with Access design this for you. When you have the time and patience, or a member who knows how to do this, click "Create" and "Report Design" to choose which query or table you will draw from, which fields you want on each contact sheet, and how you want the sheet to be organized. Once you design the report, running housecall or contact sheets in the future, based on your updated database information, is easy.

- **Access Report templates:** If you click on "Create" and "Report Wizard," you can choose from some of the pre-designed report formats in Access 2007. These options will create better-looking lists than you will get by just printing the datasheet of a query, and can help visually organize your information.

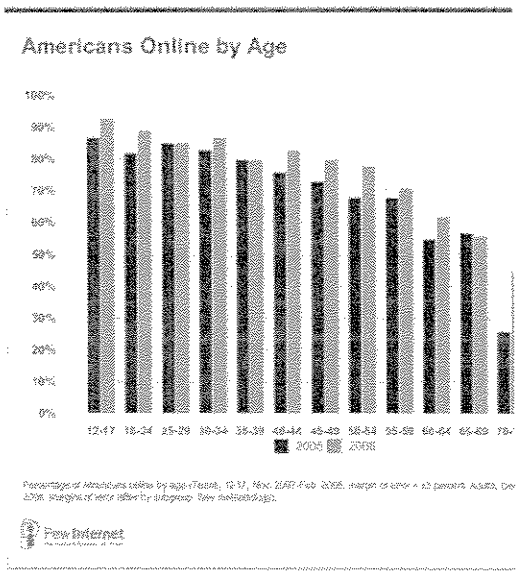
- **Totals, Sums, and Other Calculations:** Access has the ability to do a range of calculations with your data. On a basic level, you can incorporate a numeric count into a query, so that the query could tell you how many workers were members in each department, or how many new hires have started work each month for the past year. On a more complex level, you could do many of the same calculations that could be performed on a spreadsheet.

- **Linking Tables:** For more information on how to link information from various tables into common queries and reports, see the Microsoft Access website.

An overwhelming majority of Americans under 70 years old are now online. E-Mail continues to be the most popular Internet activity.

Most local unions are now using e-mail for some of their communication needs. The reason is clear; a sharply growing number of Americans in every age group are on the Internet, and e-mail is the most popular online activity.

In fact, a 2009 report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 74% of Internet users age 64 and older send and receive e-mail. While e-mail use has slipped slightly among teens, in favor of instant messaging and social networking, 73% of teens still report using e-mail (down from 89% in 2004.)



We're all using e-mail, but are we using it well? What lessons have unions and non-profits learned about using e-mail effectively?

1. The Most Important Factor in Successful E-Mail Outreach: ACCURATE LISTS!!!!!

Mariya Strauss, Media Coordinator for the International Labor Communication Association (ILCA), emphasizes the critical importance of continually gathering and updating e-mail lists. Strauss conducts training workshops for local unions across the country on communication and technology. When it comes to e-mail campaigns, she says, "If participants only take away one thing from this workshop, it should be the importance of devoting the time and planning necessary to maintain accurate e-mail lists."

How can unions be more successful in maintaining an accurate e-mail list?

- Add space for an e-mail address on every form your union uses (membership cards, meeting sign -in sheets, grievance investigation forms) and send around an e-mail address form at meetings.
- Publicize your e-mail list on your website, in your newsletter, and through officers and stewards. Be sure to explain why the list is important, and what it will be used for.
- Periodically give stewards contact cards for each of the members they represent, and ask them to collect members' e-mail addresses while explaining what the list will be used for.
- Consider creative means of collecting addresses. Mariya Strauss offers the example of the Washington DC Metro Council of the AFL-CIO, which periodically holds raffles that require union participants to enter their e-mail address in order to enter the contest.
- Follow a consistent procedure for entering and updating e-mail address information. Ideally, enter the information into a membership database, then cut and paste or upload all current e-mail addresses into your e-mail software regularly.
- Be sure to consistently enter any changes or "bad addresses" after each mailing.

Update your list frequently

Even if you have e-mail addresses for nearly all your members, you will continually need to update the list as addresses change., According to a 2009 report by the Nonprofit Technology Network (NTEN), 19% of e-mail addresses "went bad" annually in 2007 and 2008.

2. Exercise Caution Regarding Employer-Provided E-Mail Addresses

If members give you their employer-provided e-mail address, you will need to consider some important questions. Does your contract allow the use of e-mail for union business? Are you willing to restrict your information to content that management will see? Even if you are cautious about the content in your messages, your members may forget that work e-mail is not private, and send reply messages that can get them in trouble. The best alternative may be to help these members create a hotmail or yahoo account.

3. Carefully Consider the Frequency, Relevance, and Quality of Your E-Mail Messages

People are receiving increasing volumes of e-mail. If your members feel you are sending too many messages, or the messages seem unimportant, soon no one will be reading them.

The following tips are adapted from a guide entitled *Running an E-Mail Program*, by the New Organizing Institute, which conducts research and training on the use of technology for progressive organizations:

- ***Brevity/focus***: focus your message like a laser on the actions you want recipients to take. Cut every unnecessary sentence that doesn't contribute to getting your readers to take action.
- ***Frequency/consistency***: consider how frequently you will send quality messages, on a regular basis. While you can't limit yourself to a rigid calendar, you want members to get used to receiving your messages, without being irritated the volume.
- ***Variety***: one way to avoid irritating your members, and keep people interested, is to send e-mails with a variety of asks. Don't let your e-mails become predictable please for the same action.
- ***Timeliness***: when a big event happens, many organizations go deep into long meetings to decide how to react. But the ability to respond quickly is important, especially with e-mail communications.
- ***Testing and Analysis***: Analyze the performance of your e-mail program, both by reviewing the results of your own e-mail campaigns, and gathering the lessons of other similar organizations.
- ***Targeting/segmenting:*** In some cases, you will have better results by sending targeted messages to certain groups among your members, who share specific interests.

4. Coordinate Your E-Mail Message with Other Forms of Communication

If you have an important message to get out, send it through several communication channels, and be sure the message is consistent.

The 2009 Non-Profit Technology Network report highlights a recent lobbying effort in which activists who received *both* an e-mail and a text message with the same content on the same day, were three times more likely to respond to the e-mail than those who only received the e-mail.

The New Organizing Institute (NOI) agrees that sending a consistent message using several means of communication "amplifies" your message; it can also help avoid "sticky internal political situations" from members who miss important information or receive different messages.

5. Composing a Quality E-Mail Message is a Lot Like Designing a Good Leaflet

- Keep it short: like a leaflet, ideally an e-mail should focus on one topic.
- Make it important: use the subject line and put key points or action requests first in the message.
- Make it easy to read: use headers and spaces between paragraphs to organize information. Don't rely on fonts and graphics that won't show up in some home computers.
- Include links—but don't rely on them: links can help keep a message short while allowing those who are interested to find more information. Include a link to your website in each e-mail message. However, Mariya Strauss from ILCA cautions that many people who access e-mail through cell-phones have difficulty connecting to links. You may need to summarize the key points from the link, or include full action instructions, in the body of the e-mail—even if it means a longer e-mail.

Sample Action Alert from Using the Internet for Outreach and Organizing, by NetAction

From: actionalert@anygroup.org
To:
Cc:
Bcc: absmith@elomen.com; ellen@designshop.com; hmurray@change.org; frankee@petshop.com

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Subject: ACTION ALERT: Call Your Supervisor to Protect IHSS Benefits

**********Do not circulate this alert after Wednesday, March 6, 2002**********

Action Alert: Call your supervisor to protect IHSS benefits from eligibility cutbacks

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors is scheduled to vote Thursday, march 7, 2002, on a proposal to decrease the maximum allowable income that qualifies an individual or a couple for free In Home Supportive Services. A DECREASE IN THE MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE INCOME COULD MEAN THAT YOU WILL HAVE TO MAKE A CO-PAYMENT IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THESE SERVICES. Even if your income is just $1 over the maximum allowable income, you could be required to pay several hundred dollars for ser vices that you now receive for free!

Call your Supervisor today and urge him or her to vote "No" on the proposed change. Forward this message to your friends and neighbors who have email. Print and distribute copies to those who don't.

Phone numbers for the Board of Supervisors:
NOTE: Call the Elections Department (554-4375) if you don't' know which Supervisor's district you are in. If

Tom Ammiano, President, 554-5144
Chris Daly, 554-7970
Matt Gonzalez, 554-7630
Tony Hall, 554-6516
Mark Leno, 554-7734
Sophie Maxwell, 554-7670
Jake McGoldrick, 554-7410
Gavin Newsom, 554-5942

you tell them your street address, they can tell you which Supervisor represents your district.

What to say to your supervisor when you call:

- Any decrease in the maximum allowable income for IHSS will be a hardship for San Francisco seniors and persons with disabilities.
- An individual who earns just $1 per month over the current maximum is already required to pay more than $200 per month for services that are free to individuals earning just $1 less per month.
- There are other programs the City can reduce that won't create hardship for the elderly and persons with disabilities. Supervisors should cut "optional" programs—instead of IHSS.

Detailed information on the program is available on the web at www.seniorsurvivalschool.org

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Contact us at: AnyGroup, 1370 main Street, SanFrancisco, CA 94108, 415-555-0000, www.anygroup.org
To Subscribe: send email to actionalert@anygroup.org with the word "subscription" in the subject line.
To Unsubscribe: send email to actionalert@anygroup.org with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject line.

Technology Choices for Sending Group E-Mails

1. Using Your Existing E-Mail Program

You don't necessarily need special software to begin communicating with members on e-mail (especially if your local is relatively small). You can set up a basic local union e-mail list using your existing program (Eudora, Outlook Express, etc.).

Load the addresses into your address book: Follow your e-mail program's instructions for entering addresses into the address book under a group or "Nickname." If the e-mail addresses are in a database, you may be able to simply copy and paste them in. If not, you'll have to type them all into the address book.

Send messages to the list: Once addresses are entered, whenever you type the group name or "Nickname" (e.g., "Local 25") into a message, the program will send a message to the entire group. If you decide to send a message to a list of e-mail addresses that are not organized under a group name, put the addresses in the bcc: line. Recipients of the e-mail won't see the information in the bcc: line, and you preserve your members' right to privacy.

There are, however, several drawbacks to using a basic e-mail program for a large list of people. You can find a more detailed discussion of this topic in the Idealware excerpt on the next page.

2. Using List-Management Software

There are many programs designed specifically for managing e-mail lists and groups. *(See next page)* If you want to go this route, you can set up lists using free systems available at sites like yahoogroups.com, topica.com, or riseup.net, or npogroups.org. These systems are easy to use, BUT be warned they have serious limitations (some include ads in messages, some can be slow if servers are overloaded, etc.) You can also have your union buy list management software. The most well-known software available for managing e-mail lists is called "LISTSERV"—full details and purchase information is at www.lsoft.com.

Types of E-mail Lists

"Opt-out" mailing list: automatic communication from the union to all members
Here you automatically subscribe all members to the list (though people who don't want to get e-mail from the union can "opt out," or ask to be removed); only the union list moderators can send mail to the list.

"Opt-in" mailing list: communication from the union to activists who choose to join the list
Interested members voluntarily join the list; only union list moderators can send mail to the list. Often members can join the list by using a form on the website (a free program for setting this up is at http://www.bravenet.com/webtools/elist/index.php) or members can get a one-time e-mail "invitation" to sign themselves up. The audience is limited, and so is its impact as a form of member communication.

Discussion Forum/Group or Listserv communication among union members/leaders
Anyone can send mail to this type of list. You can choose whether or how to moderate the group, depending on the tool you use. For example, you can set the system so that all posts go first to a moderator, who decides whether each will be posted to the group. On the other extreme, you can decide to have no moderator for the group, Pros of unmoderated groups: fosters input, discussion, no delays in posts appearing, requires less time to maintain. Cons of unmoderated groups: no control over content, people may receive high volumes of e-mails and decide not to participate, a few people might dominate the discussion.

A Review of E-Mail Tools for Sending Mass E-Mail Messages

The Following two pages contain an excerpt from a November 2008 Article by Idealware, an organization that provides excellent reviews of technology for use by nonprofits:

Tools You Already Have

You can probably send broadcast emails with the software you already own. While such options won't provide sophisticated reports or effectively deliver hundreds of emails, they might be a practical choice for a very small mailing list.

•**Outlook (or other email browsers):** Outlook and other standard email browsers will certainly work to send a couple dozen emails. However, this method has some substantial disadvantages. First, putting lots of email addresses into the BCC field (the standard procedure for emailing a large, anonymous group) may cause your email to be flagged as Spam. Second, it's difficult to create complex formatting, like an eNews layout, that will show up in readers' browsers as intended. And third, you'll have to manually manage your list. There's a lot of effort involved in adding new subscribers, deleting those who ask to be removed and monitoring returned emails—remember, you are legally responsible for removing those people who request it. If you send more than a few dozen emails at a time, or send to a list on a periodic basis, most of our contributors strongly advise you to look beyond standard email browsers.

•**Mailman (or other email list tools offered by your web host):** If your Web site is hosted by a commercial shared hosting service, there is a good chance that your hosting package already includes Mailman—check your Web site control panel. This email list tool allows you to post a plain text or graphic message to a large distribution list by sending the message to a specific email address. The downsides are that Mailman's not the easiest tool to use, and it lacks several features common to other tools. For example, you can't export your subscriber list, or access reports of how many readers opened an email or clicked on a link. If you're sending more than a hundred or so emails at a time, again, look beyond these options.

Using your existing browser or Mailman may work for you under some circumstances, there are some sizable downsides. b. Because they send email from your own domain and email server, you need to be concerned that your emails will be trapped by Spam filters and never make it to your subscribers. Tools designed to send millions of emails (like those listed below) work carefully with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) such as AOL and Yahoo to ensure their email is delivered. You can't easily do this as an individual organization. If you send out a lot of emails, some people are likely to complain that your emails are Spam regardless of how careful you are. If this happens, all your emails could be labeled as Spam, or your domain could be blacklisted. If that happens, major ISPs will refuse to deliver any email from you—including your organization's day-to-day email. If you're only sending out a thousand or two emails a month, you probably don't need to be concerned, but at larger volumes, it is well worth looking into other options.

And one final issue: if your email is hosted through a shared server, that Web host may put a cap on the number of emails you can send per hour or per day. This could be as low as 50 or 100 per hour, and it could simply stop sending emails after this time. If you're going to be sending out to groups of 50 or more, check with your Web host to make sure they'll go through.
Do these methods sound problematic? They are. If you're serious about sending emails in bulk to more than a few dozen people, there are better options

Inexpensive and Straightforward

These are three online tools that allow you send emails to a list for free: **Google Groups** (http://groups.google.com/), **Yahoo Groups** (http://groups.yahoo.com/), and **Topica's free service** (http://lists.topica.com/). These three tools are very similar in that they let you send plain text emails to an unlimited

(Excerpt from Idealware November 2008 Review of E-Mail Broadcast Tools, continued)

number of addresses. Most typically used for discussion lists to allow a group of people to email each other, there's no reason you can't use them to send text-only emails to a group.
People can subscribe or unsubscribe by sending an email to a particular address. All three tools show substantial advertisements at the top of the email messages you send, and none allow you to track how many opened an email or clicked on a link. The emails are sent off the providers' servers, so they handle some of the issues around deliverability and blacklisting.

If you're looking for similar functionality without the ads, consider Electric Embers by NPOGroups (www.electricembers.net). This nonprofit-friendly service provides affordable pricing on a sliding scale, starting at $10/month for 2,500 subscribers, and $5 per additional 5,000, and a bit more control over your list. However, it doesn't easily support formatting beyond text-only emails.

Online Mass Emailing Tools
One of the most common ways to send bulk emails is to use an online service set up for precisely such a function. Hosted email tools typically allow you to manage your list, create emails and view reports through a Web-based interface. Most will allow you to send formatted emails; some provide tools to let you easily format them. You can generally integrate them into your Web site so you can take subscriptions online, and the tools will automatically manage unsubscribe requests and delete email addresses that are no longer valid. Reports allow you to see how many recipients opened a particular email, and how many clicked on a link.

Nonprofit Specific Deals
There's little difference between the typical needs of a nonprofit and those of a business when it comes to sending emails. However, two robust services provide very attractive pricing for nonprofits, making them the obvious choice—if they'll meet your needs.

VerticalResponse (www.verticalresponse.com)
VerticalResponse is a reliable, sophisticated and popular online service that allows 501(c)(3) nonprofits to send up to 10,000 emails per month for free. It's strong in deliverability—ensuring your emails go into your subscribers' inboxes rather than their Spam filters—segmentation and Web integration, and has a number of options that make it easier to integrate with constituent databases (especially Salesforce). However, the interface can be complex at times, and the built in graphic-designed templates aren't as polished as some other tools. After the 10,000 free emails, it gets a bit expensive—if you're sending more than 15,000 emails a month or so, compare prices to other options. While VerticalResponse has been offering their free nonprofit program for about six months now, and appears quite committed to it, this kind of philanthropy makes some of our contributors nervous—if the company's priorities change down the road, you might need to start paying or find another service.

EmailNow by Network for Good, powered by Emma (https://www.groundspring.org/services/emailnow.cfm)
EmailNow is a very attractive choice if you send more than 15,000 emails per month. They've recently scrapped their old platform, and instead cut a deal with another service, Emma, to provide a reliable and sophisticated service at nonprofit rates. Emma is tailored to those who want to send good looking, formatted emails without knowledge of HTML coding, and provides great standard templates—or, they'll design a custom one for you for $199. EmailNow's feature set generally matches Vertical Response's, with strong Web integration and segmentation, but a somewhat complex interface. Network for Good also provides strong, nonprofit-friendly support. At $29.95 per month for up to 20,000 emails, and $2 for every 1,000 thereafter (501c3s, c4s, and c6s only), it's a great deal—especially for those with big lists.

Other Approaches to E-Mail Activism and Messaging Campaigns

Online Surveys

When you need to poll your members (for bargaining preparation, legislative or political opinions, etc), you have several options. In addition to the traditional options (paper surveys, simple e-mails with survey questions) some unions use online survey tools to help design user-friendly surveys, deliver the surveys to members' e-mail accounts, and collect and analyze results.

Idealware published an article about Online Survey Tools in October 2008 entitled "A Few Good Online Survey Tools," that describes the various functions online surveys can perform, reviews the major tools available, and offers suggestions for choosing the right tool. The major companies included in the review include: SurveyMonkey, Zoomerang, SurveyGizmo, and PollDaddy. Idealware also reviewed online survey tools that bundle in additional features, including: Constant Contact, FormSite, and Moodle.

The Idealware review is online at: http://www.idealware.org/articles/fgt_online_surveys.php

Online Petitions

Like online survey tools, you can supplement your face-to-face petition-gathering efforts by using one of a variety of online petition tools. These programs usually allow participants to forward the petition to friends, and can help you build a list of people interested in supporting your efforts.

Idealware has published a review of online petition options, including CitizenSpeak, eAdvocacy from Action Studio, Democracy in Action, AMP by Radical Designs. The report also suggests that you look at your existing programs, such as e-newsletter software, that may be able to provide you the same function without buying an additional program. Higher-cost integrated e-activist tools can run online petitions, as well as political action, and other types of e-mail campaigns.

Idealware's review is online at http://www.idealware.org/articles/fgt_online_petitions.php

Mobile Phone Messaging Campaigns

If many of your members don't have frequent e-mail access, but they carry cell phones, text messaging campaigns can be effective.

For example, an Illinois union activist described his local's use of text messaging campaigns during contract negotiations. At the end of key negotiation sessions, the bargaining team sent text messages to members' cell phones with a brief update from the negotiations and instructions to put on armbands that the union had distributed. By the time management returned to the plant, members across the facility were wearing armbands. The activist felt that demonstrating members' rapid ability to mobilize helped pressure management to reach a better settlement.

An article by Alan Rosenblatt, founder of the Internet Advocacy Center, recommends a free online social network tool called Mozes that connects to cell phones. For example, you can set up a campaign keyword, then ask people at an event to text message the keyword to MOZES (66937). Mozes will send your custom message back to them and capture their contact information for future alerts and messages. The article "Affordable New Tools and Strategies for Online Activism" also contains other useful technology suggestions, and can be found on the Idealware website at http://www.idealware.org/articles/online_advocacy_tools.php

Local Union Websites: Deciding Whether and How to Set One Up

Nearly everyone is on the Internet, so you have to have a website, right? Wrong!

Like any form of communication, websites can be enormously useful tools, but only with a lot of planning and regular maintenance. Because nearly everyone is on the Internet, you can potentially influence a broad array of people with a good website. If you have a poorly maintained or outdated website, however, you not only diminish the number of people who visit your site, but also risk giving a broad array of people a negative impression of your organization.

If you are not sure a website will be an effective strategy for achieving your key goals, or you don't have the time and resources to regularly maintain it, maybe a website is not the right tool for your local.

If you are preparing to set up a website, Mariya Strauss (Media Coordinator for the International Labor Communication Association) recommends the following steps in workshops she conducts with union members:

- Map out your site: what information do you need on the website, and how should it be organized to reflect your goals and priorities? For example, many union sites include: news, campaigns, documents (forms, union by-laws, contracts), organizer contact information, resource listings (allied organizations, discounts and benefits, news sources/feeds), events calendar, and images (video, audio)
- Decide how much time you or others will devote to the website. Remember, you must update at least every month and make sure everything is working properly. Experienced webmasters report they need at least 10 hours per month to do this, with more time at the beginning.
- Decide who will be responsible for getting content and how they will make sure it goes on the site.
- Find an available domain name or get one from your international union
- Purchase hosting services—desk space where your website's infrastructure resides. You can purchase from a private vendor, or get service from your international.
- Learn the CMS (Content Management System) tools you will be using most often. Practice putting things up and taking them down.
- Gather your content.
- Build the site using your written map as a reference. Test everything in different web browsers on different computes, Mac and PC, and different screens
- Show the site in "test" phase to at least three people.
- Make necessary changes.
- Go live!
- Start tracking your traffic.

CWA's Guide to Establishing and Maintaining Local Union Websites

The Communication Workers of America have a packet that is available on their website at http://www.cwa-union.org/resources/local-website-tools/cwa-guide-to-/
While some information is slightly outdated, it provides an excellent foundation for local unions planning a website. The next few pages include the Overview and Content sections of the packet:

Steps to Setting Up a Site: A Brief Overview

1. Assess the goals of your Web site. Determine the type of Web site you will need and the ways in which a Web site will help your local and your members. Also decide whether you want a simple "canned" Web site that doesn't involve much technical know-how on your part, a Web site that is handled by local staff or volunteers, or a site that is managed by an outside firm. Setting up a special committee for policy and review considerations may help in establishing the site's content and mission.

2. Assess your audience(s). Who is your Web site designed to reach? Average members? Stewards and activists? The media? The general public? Figure out who your main users are likely to be and design the site accordingly.

3. Assess your resources. In order to set up and run a Web site, you will need the proper hardware and software, as well as adequate staffing. Following are among the requirements for each:

- Hardware requirements: a 486 or higher computer PC processor (or Macintosh equivalent) that has a minimum of 64 MB of RAM and runs Windows 98 or higher; a 56K or faster computer modem or a cable modem; Internet access via an Internet Service Provider (ISP); and a Web hosting service (some ISPs offer this service).
- Software requirements: an HTML editor, an Internet browser, a graphics program (if you plan to create or edit graphics), and, depending on the hosting service you use, an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) program.
- Staffing requirements: at least one trained local officer, volunteer, or staff person should be available on a part-time basis, at minimum, to administer and update the site and to answer e-mail. Also, depending on your needs, you may want to hire an outside firm to design, manage, or enhance your site.

4. Designate a Webmaster. The ideal person should be trained in HTML and Web-ready graphics, and should have background knowledge of computers. Writing and editing skills also are important.

5. Do an outline or flowchart of the proposed site. Start with five or six - or fewer --main categories of information that will be listed on the homepage and under which all the information on the site can be grouped. Then, build from there. The site's navigation should follow a logical and coherent structure.

6. Determine the level of sophistication and complexity of the site, based on your budget, time and resource limitations, and the processing power of most of your audience's computers. Consider whether your audience will be able to download such features as animated graphics, sound, and video without long waiting periods. Also, while setting up a way for your users to send you e-mail is recommended, you should first make sure you have adequate personnel and resources to respond to messages from members. Starting out simple is best; more advanced capabilities can always be added later.

CWA Guide (continued)

7. Find an Internet Service Provider (ISP) and a Web hosting service. Many ISPs offer free Web hosting for small sites in addition to standard Internet connections. Larger, more complicated sites, on the other hand, usually require the use of paid Web hosting services.

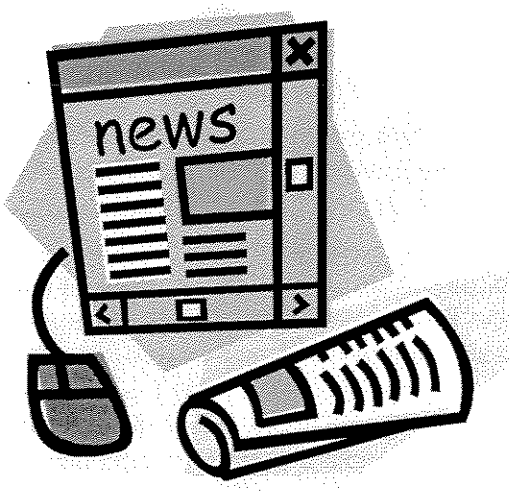
8. Choose an address for your site (e.g., www.cwalocal123.org) and register it with a domain name registration service such as Network Solutions (www.networksolutions.com). (Some Web hosting services will take care of this step for you.) The cost is $70 for a two-year term. See Picking the Right Site Address for information on how to choose a domain name for your site.

9. Set up, test and launch the site. Create a first draft on paper and circulate it for feedback. Then, once the site is ready, launch it in a test area and ask for feedback again. Try to have as much of the site completed as possible (without too many "Under Construction" areas) before you publicly launch it.

10. Publicize the site to Internet search engines and in your print publications and other materials. (Many Web hosting services will register your site with search engines for you.) Also, notify the CWA National office so that your site will be listed on the National's Web site.

11. Keep the site updated regularly and stay on top of e-mail. Update your site regularly - once a week is probably the minimum - and make sure that news and other important information remains fresh. Also, make sure that e-mail inquiries get answered in a timely manner.

12. Consider communicating through e-mail. As an added member communications tool, you may want to gather members' e-mail addresses by soliciting them through the Web site, at membership meetings, or through the local's newsletter. Collecting e-mail addresses can also be a one-on-one mobilization activity.



CWA Guide to Establishing and Maintaining Local Web Sites: Determining Content

Audience Considerations

Once you've established your budget and selected your site's Webmaster, the next step is to assess your audience (or audiences). Local Web site audiences often include members, potential members, retirees, local community and political leaders, national leaders, and progressive activists. Other potential audiences include the public at large, opinion elites, the media, politicians and their staff, coalition partners, educators, and students. While you should keep all of these potential audiences in mind, determine which ones will be your priorities when you structure and design your site.

Next, ask, "What will our main users want from the site?" To help find out, consider polling your local stewards and activists or other key groups.

Following is an example of a poll that CWA Dist. 4 recently distributed to its e-mail discussion list:

> To: Dist. 4 List
> From: Seth Rosen, Admin Asst. to the VP, Dist. 4
> RE: Ideas for a District 4 Web Page
>
> Vice President Rechenbach has gotten approval to create a District 4 Web site next year. To aid in the Web design process, we are interested in any ideas that people might have. In particular, we would like to know the following:
>
> 1.What kind of information would be useful on a D4 Web site? Should it primarily be a source of **news** (e.g., an electronic version of memos and newsletters that now are sent through mail or fax) or should it primarily be a **resource library** (information like contracts, reports, etc.)?
> 2.What technical limits exist? Will graphics & photos make it too slow for your modem speed? Will people download files (e.g., contracts, pamphlets), or does everything have to able to be readable on line?
> 3.Who is likely to be the main users of a D4 site: Officers? Stewards? Members? All of the above?
> 4.Check out the CWA National site, www.cwa-union.org. What should be different about a D4 site? What should be the same? Why have a D4 site?
>
> Persons in this discussion group are the most likely Web site users, so your comments and suggestions will be very helpful.
>
> Thanks, in advance, for your ideas.

You can visit District 4's Web site at district4.cwa-union.org.

Another way to determine site content is to gather input at membership or work-site meetings. Or, you might try a newsletter survey. These are good ways of gauging the type of computer equipment your users have and the extent to which they use that equipment.

A second question is, "What are your goals?" Do you want to make information available to your members? Publish your contract(s)? Communicate with the media? You should establish these priorities first, before you design the site.

Keeping in mind that the content and structure of the site should be geared to your prime audience(s), you should then structure the site accordingly. Using an outline or a flow-chart will help.

Policy Considerations

Establishing a local union Web site often involves addressing broad policy concerns such as whether to include contracts, bargaining updates, and mobilization information. To best address these concerns, your executive board may choose to establish a special committee to make Web-site-related policy decisions. You may also need to educate key decision-makers with regard to the Web and develop a clear-cut decision-making and approval structure, similar to one you may already have established for newsletters or news releases.

Among key policy decisions is whether to set up discussion boards or e-mail discussion lists. While such services often help build support and solidarity among members, they may also potentially become complaint centers for disgruntled members or activists. If you do set up one of these forums, you may want to assign an officer or staff person to moderate the discussion.

Items to Make Available on a Web Site

After you have determined your audience(s) and addressed policy concerns, the next step is to determine site content. Following is a list of possible content categories and items:

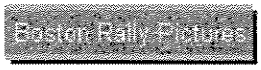
- News/Publicity
  - press releases;
  - newspaper/newsletter articles; and
  - photos of leaders and members in action
- General Information
  - local officers' names and areas of responsibility;
  - the local's address, telephone number, hotline number, fax number, and e-mail address;
  - important meeting dates; and
  - the local's background and history
- Hot Issues
  - contract(s) and/or bargaining information updates, including putting the local's entire contract(s) online;
  - mobilization information;
  - political activity information (see "Legalities, Formalities, and More");
  - information for retirees;
  - health and safety information; and
  - information on other worker issues
- Contact Information
  - e-mail and/or a "Contact Us" form
- Other
  - search capabilities;
  - tools for officers and stewards, such as grievance forms; and
  - links to other sites, including union sites, government sites, reference sites, and others

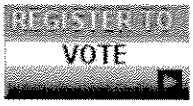
See "Examples of CWA Local Sites," for other ideas for site content and structure.

Some Union-Specific Website Design Considerations...

Your site should address your local union's distinct needs. As you're making decisions in building your site, and as you maintain and change its features, ask yourself if the web site is reflecting and carrying out the goals of your local. Look at other union web sites for ideas and examples.
For example:

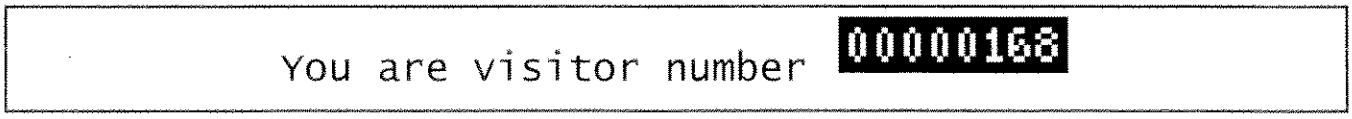
Sample home page buttons from some of Union Web Steward's "Web Sites of the Month"





- If you want your web site to be an outreach tool, does the site provide for two-way communications, with e-mail and phone contact information available? If you're trying to build an e-mail list, does the site include a feature for capturing visitors' e-mail addresses?
- If you are trying to increase member involvement in politics, does the site contain political action information, including instructions for activists?
- If you are trying to increase membership, does the site include information on how and why to join the union, including a way to access a membership card on the site?
- If you are trying to encourage more workers in your area to unionize, does the site have an organizing section?
- If you are trying to publicize accomplishments and activities, does the site showcase these on a regular basis?
- Does the site include links to the international union, to other locals, the IFL and Central Labor Council, and other resources?
- If you're trying to increase member knowledge of the contract, is the contract, or a guide to key contract provisions on the site?

Free web counters can keep track of who is visiting your site and how often: monitor this use and determine if your site is serving the audience(s) you intended (leaders, members, the general public?)



Union Web Sites: Some Legal and Other Issues

1) Check with your international union
Most unions have policies on local union web sites (what should and shouldn't be included, suggested links, etc.). As you start setting up a new site, or whenever you are in doubt about a piece of content, check with your union!

2) Political Candidates on Your Web Site
Unlike your union newsletter which is mailed to members only, most Web sites are open to public viewing. Because of this, different legal restrictions apply on political content endorsing or advocating for candidates. Most general political information (issues, statistics, etc.) is ok to include on the site, but if you want to publicize your union's endorsement of candidates, or if your newsletter argues for defeating certain candidates, you must follow the rules below before putting it on your union site:

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) has ruled that restrictions on spending for television and newspaper advertising also apply to web sites. This means that if you feature an article in your local newsletter announcing the union's endorsement of a candidate, you can't automatically post the same article on your Web site, because on line, the article can be considered an "ad," on a site paid for with members' dues money.

According to an AFL-CIO memo regarding partisan political content on union web sites:
"The FEC interprets and enforces the Federal Election Campaign Act to preclude a union or corporation from listing on its Web site endorsements of presidential and other federal candidates, or otherwise expressly advocating on its Web site a candidate's election or defeat, if the Web site is accessible by the general public." FEC considers a publicly accessible Web site "to be a means of public communication comparable to other outlets, such as leaflets and print or broadcast advertising." Using the site for political endorsements violates the FEC rule that bars unions and corporations from using their treasuries to communicate partisan advocacy messages beyond their so-called 'restricted classes,' which for unions includes union members, union executive and administrative personnel, and their families.

What to Do? If you want to include candidate endorsement information on your site, there are two possible solutions:

1) **Pay part of your Web bill from COPE funds.** Put a disclaimer on pages with political endorsements, keep track of the percent of the total space these pages take up on the site, and bill your COPE or political action fund for that percentage of your Web service bill.

> *Sample disclaimer: "This portion of the Website is paid for by the CWA Committee on Political Education, with voluntary contributions from union members and their families, and is not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee.*

Portions of this section were adapted from the CWA "Guide to Establishing and Maintaining Local Web Sites" page on "Legalities, Formalities, and More."

Union Web Sites: Some Legal and Other Issues (continued)

2) **Set up a "members-only" section of your web site.** Some web sites contain both public information, plus a "members-only" section that can only be entered with a password (be aware that this will require several steps: getting technical help setting up the feature, distributing individual passwords to members, and explaining the feature ... plus convincing people to use it!). If you go this route, it is fine to put political endorsements on this part of the site.

Copyright and Trademark Issues

Many photos and logos on the web are copyrighted, meaning you can't just cut and paste them into your web site without permission.

You can and should use your union's logo on your site, but corporate logos are protected by copyright/trademark law—don't put your company's logo on your site unless you have permission.

It's ok to link to articles and photos in other copyrighted publications, but usually not ok to cut and paste the full text into your site.

It *is* usually ok (and in fact encouraged practice!) to use articles from other union publications, including materials from the AFL-CIO, Iowa Federation of Labor, and your international union. Just mention the source when you reprint articles from other union publications (for example: "Reprinted from the Spring 1997 issue of the IAM Journal. c.1997 JAM. All Rights Reserved.")

If in doubt, it is always ok to quote part of an article within your own article, as long as you attribute the source.

Member permission

If you're using member photos on the web, as a courtesy, you might consider asking first to make sure it's ok. Some members who don't mind seeing their photo in the members-only newsletter might not feel comfortable having the same photos available to a worldwide public audience.

Key Resources for Union Web Designers

Check first with your international union to see if they have a set of policy guidelines for local union web sites, or if they offer resources and help in setting up your site!

CWA's "Local Web Site Tools"
http://www.cwa-union.org/resources/local-website-tools/
A comprehensive guide to websites for CWA locals, this website includes links to templates, graphics, and the CWA's "Guide to Establishing and Maintaining Local Websites." Comprehensive step-by-step guide to creating, publicizing, and maintaining a site; includes scores of additional resources and some basic technical guidance.

Idealware
http://www.idealware.org/
Provides reports and reviews of technology and software for nonprofit organizations. The website contains a variety of reports related to website production and design.

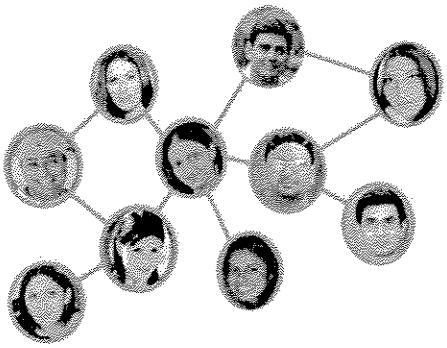
International Labor Communication Association
http://www.ilcaonline.org/
The professional association of labor communicators in North America. Media Coordinator Mariya Strauss is an excellent source of information, and conducts workshops with unions on the use of websites and technology for union communication.

LabourStart
Best Websites of the Year (http://www.labourstart.org/lwsoty/) – LabourStart hosts and annual contest for the best union websites each year – this is a good site to check and see what works for a good union website.

Union Web Services
http://www.unionwebservices.com/
Has two very useful resources for ideas:
"Web Site of the Month" reviews point out interesting features of other local union web sites.
"Resource of the Month" section suggests useful resources for union web masters.

Online Social Networks: Organizing Opportunities or Disorganized Distractions?

What Are Online Social Networks?



"Social network" is a term that has long been used by sociologists to describe structures in which individuals or organizations are tied together by similar values, interests, locations, etc.

"Online social networks" (or "social network services") are web sites designed to build online communities of people. The sites typically offer users a free account which allows access to tools for communicating with other users by posting to the site, e-mailing, messaging, blogging, uploading photos or videos, chatting, etc.

Examples of Currently Popular Social Networking Sites:

DIGG: Web users "DIGG" and comment on the latest news.

Facebook: Originally built as an online community for students to post personal profiles and keep in touch with friends; now open to the public and non-profit organizations.

Flickr: Online hub for storing and sharing photos.

LinkedIn: A networking site for business professionals.

MySpace: Interactive website that supports user profiles, blogs, videos, photos, etc.

Twitter: Allows users to send 140 character updates or "tweets" to "followers" via text messaging, the web, or instant messenger.

YouTube: Community of people who like to share, rate and comment on videos.

Online Social Network Statistics:

Facebook: Over 200 million users

- Average of 250,000 new registrations per day since Jan. 2007
- Sixth most-trafficked site in the United States

Fastest-growing demographic is age 55 and over

MySpace: 67.9 million users
45% between the ages of 18-34
29% between the ages of 12-17

Twitter: Over 4.1 million users

- 47% between the ages of 18-34
  31% between the ages of 35-49

http://www.radcampaign.com/blog/32

Are social networking sites useful tools for unions?

Because social networking sites have become broadly popular only within the last couple of years, activists are still grappling with whether and how the sites might be useful for communication, organizing and mobilizing purposes.

Many unions have already established presences on social network sites—either at the national, state, or local level. Some unions are using the sites to facilitate discussions among members or to post updates on union activities (using the sites somewhat like an online bulletin board). In isolated instances, groups have used the sites to organize strike support or other rapid response activities. But how effective social networking sites are for union organizing actions is still "up for debate."

Union organizers have found Facebook to be a useful tool since when workers have already formed a communication network on-line, often this "social network" can form the basis for an organizing committee where "the issues [have] been identified, the workplace mapped, the barriers detailed, the inside committee established, and the leadership (s)elected."

On the other hand, Facebook and other social networking sites can't be considered "safe spaces" for free discussion about the workplace, and the sites have a record of placing barriers in the way of large-scale on-line organizing campaigns. For example:

- Nothing posted on sites is truly "private" and workers should assume comments about work or the union might end up in the hands of management. Many cases have already arisen of workers being disciplined based on information they shared on social network sites (e.g., checking on workers' status and activities when they've called in sick).
- In 2007, SEIU used Facebook as a communication tool during an organizing campaign at a Halifax casino. The casino's lawyer contacted Facebook and succeeded in getting the organizing committee's Facebook group shut down.
- Facing an organizing blitz in 2008, Starbucks managers copied member lists from the Facebook accounts of recent graduates of progressive labor studies programs, then matched the lists to lists of employees to identify (and then fire or refuse to hire) pro-union "salts" who were helping to organize a union at Starbucks.

In response to some of these concerns, LabourStart (an online global labor news service) has created an independent, union-run social networking site called "Unionbook" (www.unionbook.org). The challenge for this type of site, however, is that its audience is limited to people who are already labor activists (so far the site has about 3,000 users).

Derek Blackadder, "Facebook Facts," *Our Times: Canada's Independent Labour Magazine* , Sept. 11, 2008.

The table below suggests a few possible "pros and cons" of social networking sites to consider when thinking about them as potential communication tools for unions.

Pros	Cons
May allow you to reach people—especially young(er) people—where they are already spending time	Sites are opt-in systems so you can't use them to reach everyone; not all of your members are likely to be active users on any particular network, and there's no guarantee you will be able reach any particular target audience
In many workplaces (union and non-union) people may already be "self-organizing" on social networking sites; sites may aid efforts to chart/map out a workplace and to foster communication within preexisting workplace social networks	Not nearly as effective as face-to-face, one-on-one communication with members at work; on-line communication supplements but can't replace old-fashioned work site conversations, house calls, etc.
Free and generally user-friendly	Corporate-owned and ad-driven; users have no control over changes in policy, possible uses of their data/networks/information, or potential for losing account along with all collected contacts
Allows reach to allies beyond just your members; can help you build a base of "friends" who know, understand, and support your union's issues	Doesn't allow you to directly collect and save the contact information for your "friends" (unless you take the time to record/store it in a separate database)
Once you have a base of "friends," you can draw them to your web site, e-activism campaign, or publicize events to them, etc.	Not designed for organizing/mobilizing use; people cannot generally take action from within social networking sites, but must be sent to some external web site or event first
Easy way to give your union some minimal on-line presence (free page or group space)	Takes significant investment of time and energy to administer and coordinate an effective organizational presence
Fastest-growing area of internet use at present	Could quickly become obsolete (e.g., MySpace already losing popularity…)

Should Your Organization Incorporate Social Networking Into Your Online Communications Plans?

Online Social Networks should be viewed as one of many tools to engage members and reach out to new supporters. While these sites can be powerful organizing tools, it takes **organizational commitment, creativity and significant staff resources** to make them worth the effort. If an organization can't commit to **updating their user profiles every couple of days, actively "befriending" new people and engaging existing "friends,"** your organization's presence may get lost in the shuffle.

In short, what you put into Online Social Networks is what you get out of them. If you don't have the time to commit, your time may be better spent strengthening your existing workplace communication structure or doing an extra leaflet and one-on-one canvass. On the other hand, if you know a lot of your members are already on Facebook or some other site, it might be worthwhile to create a union presence to supplement to your existing communication structure and make it easy for members to spread union information through this network.

Top 5 Tips For Engaging Online Social Networks

1. Recruit New Friends: Search for users who share similar interests to your organization's mission and befriend them. Also take some time to get to know them. At the end of the day online social networks are about building a base of "friends."

2. Freshen Up Profiles: Update user profiles every couple of days with new stories, interesting facts, new videos, blog entries, photos, etc.

3. Keep It Casual: Messaging should have a casual tone as if you were talking to a friend on email. It should not be wonky or preachy.

4. Get To The Point: You are competing with hundreds and sometimes even thousands of "friends" profiles and messages. Keep your messages short and to the point. Provide links back to your website for more detailed information.

5. Two-Way Communication: Ask your "members/friends" to share their opinions and have them post their responses online. Respond to their comments so they know someone is reading their posts.

Tips in this box come from Rad Campaign, a communications service for nonprofit organizations. See http://www.radcampaign.com/blog/32

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com

The Basic Features of Facebook

Note that this is not an exhaustive guide to Facebook. This list covers only the basic features that a local union might find most useful for establishing a Facebook presence.

Privacy Settings

In order to do anything on Facebook, first you must sign up for an individual account. When setting up your account, the first privacy filter is the option to not include information. You are not *required* to answer all of the questions asked for in your profile. If you don't want your address, phone number, birthday, etc., posted on the internet, don't type them in. Beyond this, Facebook provides filters you can use; for example, for most types of profile information, you can choose whether the item will be seen by "everyone," "just friends" or no one. Take the time (and use the "help" function if needed) to set these filters if you are concerned about privacy! And of course always keep in mind that the nature of a social network where information is passed from person to person means that nothing is truly "private"—anything you post may end up being seen by people other than just your "friends."

Finding/Adding Friends

The basis for any type of organizing through a social networking site is building a group of "friends" with whom you can communicate. Once you set up an account on Facebook, you can find and add "friends" (other Facebook users) by using various functions (searching by name, your e-mail address book, etc.). Anyone you become friends with will receive your status updates and will be able to access the information you post on your profile, the list of your friends, etc. (unless you actively bar them from doing so using the privacy settings). When people become your "friends," you gain the capacity to send messages directly to them.

Status Update

Status updates are short messages that are automatically sent to the news feeds of your "friends." These status updates are often used by activists to post links to news items, to post links to petitions or on-line issue campaign sites, or to post announcements or reminders of upcoming events.

Message

The Message function allows you to send a private message (much like e-mail) to the inbox of any (or all) of your "friends." This type of message is visible only to the sender and recipient(s).

Events

The Event function allows you to create a page announcing an upcoming event and inviting some or all of your "friends" to attend. Invited guests can then RSVP so you can keep track of attendance. Registering an event requires you to enter an event name, network, host name, event type, start and end time, location, and a guest list of friends invited. Events can be open to the public, closed (open only to selected "friends"), or secret. When setting up an event you can choose to allow friends to in turn invite their friends and/or to allow friends to post additional information about the event to the page (e.g., photos, videos, links, comments, etc.).

Basic Features of Facebook (continued)

Groups

The Group function allows you to create a page for a particular organization (e.g., your local union, labor council, etc.) Once you set up a group page you can invite friends to "join" the group and/or allow friends to invite other friends to join. Groups can be open to the public or limited only to members you identify or approve. A group page includes: a list of the members who have joined, space for posting "recent news," a discussion board, a space for posted photos/videos and all associated comments of such items. When you set up the group you can control whether the group page is open to posting from all members or only from you or a small group of approved administrators. Those who are designated administrators of a group will also have the capacity to send messages (essentially a mass e-mail) to up to 1,000 members of the group.

Public Profiles ("Pages")

Alternatively, organizations can create "Public Profiles" (formerly known as "Pages") which allow users to become "fans." The key differences between a "group" and a "public profile" page are that group pages have more interactive features (bulletin board, forum, etc.) but public profile pages can accommodate much higher numbers (potentially thousands) of "fans." Owners can send updates to their fans, which show up on users' home pages.

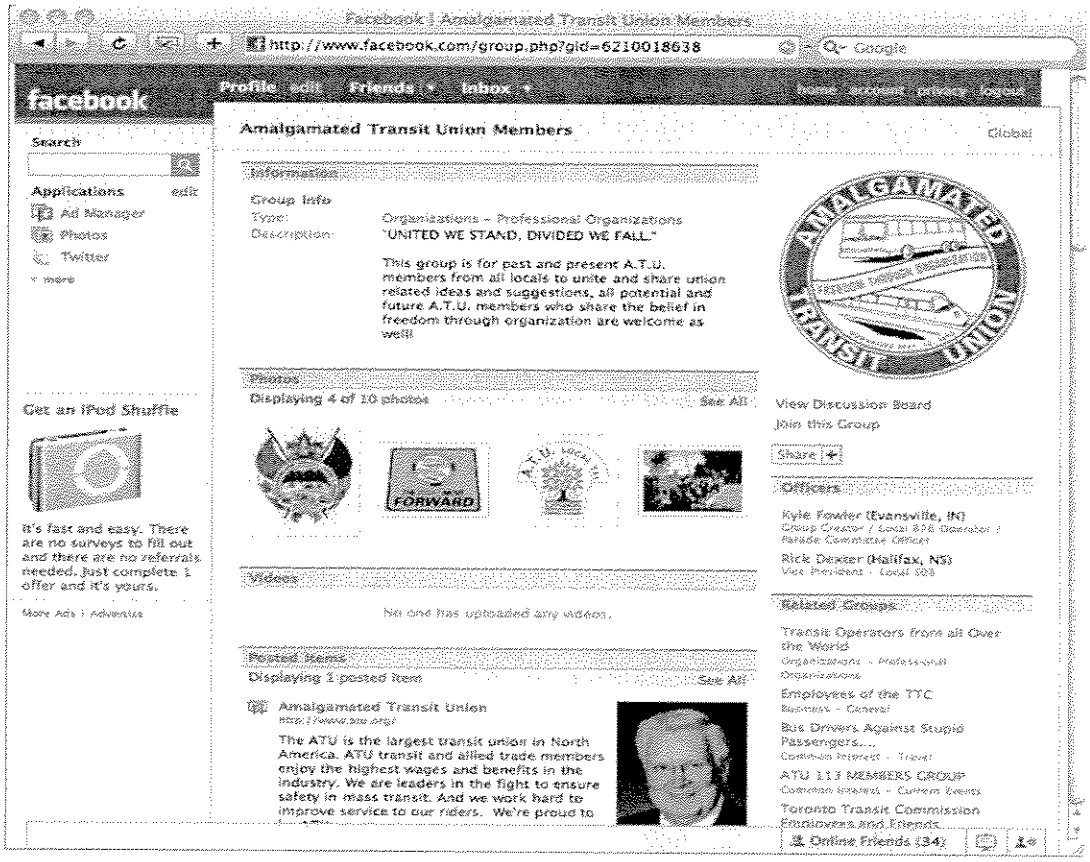


Image from International Labor Communication Association Training Materials

TechSoup's 10 Steps for Planning a Successful Webinar

TechSoup (www.techsoup.org) offers technology information, resources, and support for nonprofits.

1. Ask yourself (and others) whether a webinar is the right tool for your needs. Consider your audience, the subject matter, and the time you'll need to cover your topic.

2. Recruit speakers and a support team. In general, the main players in a webinar are: the organizer/ facilitator, the presenter or presenters, and assistants. You might fill all of these roles yourself, or assign them to three different people. Bear in mind, though, we only recommend the going-solo approach for an experienced trainer addressing a small audience.

3. Determine the format. A webinar can be structured in a variety of formats to suit different purposes. Some popular formats include: one speaker (a single presenter speaks and answers audience questions); interview style (a facilitator asks the speaker predetermined questions); moderated panel discussion (a moderator facilitates a discussion featuring several speakers); interactive (audience members participate fully via instructor-led exercises and conversations).

4. Plan your visuals. Some visuals you may wish to include are: an introductory slide reminding your audience how to log in to the audio and what time the webinar will begin; a slide introducing each presenter including title, affiliation, and a photo; a quick agenda overview; visuals and demonstrations of web sites or tools you will be discussing.

5. Pick a tool. There are dozens of Web conferencing tools, offering a variety of features tailored to different needs. Idealware's article A Few Good Online Conferencing Tools offers a roundup of affordable software options, and TechSoup's webinar Getting to Know Online Conferencing Tools describes how online conferencing tools work, how they can help your organization, and the variety of software options out there.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- How many people will the tool accommodate?
- How much does it cost?
- Which features will you need?
- How is audio handled?
- Do you want to record the webinars and make them available for later viewing?

6. Create an agenda. Meet with the speakers to determine what questions will be asked, which topics will be covered, in what order, assign timelines, and ask for any visuals they want to include.

7. Schedule a dry run. A few days before your webinar, schedule at least one 30-60-minute run-through with all participants to work out any unresolved questions or technical issues. Introduce the webinar tool and its features, and check equipment. Review your agenda and visuals.

8. Reserve your equipment and space. Headsets for the presenters and organizer, rather than trying to lift a phone while using a mouse and keyboard (never present using a speaker phone because of poor audio quality). A power cord as a backup for your laptop battery, a network cable.

9. Set up a system for registering attendees. Some programs offer built-in registration tools.

10. Publicize! Begin sending out information two to three weeks before the event. Create an engaging, succinct description and convey clearly who the webinar is for.

Excerpt from Idealware Article: "A Few Good Online Conferencing Tools" July 2008

Online Seminar Tools

Online seminar tools typically add features such as chat, slide-sharing, the ability to promote participants to presenters and integrated voice conferencing into the basic desktop and application features. They're designed to allow organizations to not only present to a group of people, but to facilitate interaction among them.

DimDim (www.dimdim.com). DimDim is a fairly new, streamlined online seminar application with support for chat, slide sharing, emoticons, white-boarding, VOIP voice conferencing and video conferencing. Only PC desktops can be shared, but DimDim supports Mac and Linux users for other features. Participants can enter meeting rooms using almost any system or browser, typically without a download. A free, ad-supported version allows up to 20 people to participate; a version without ads starts at $99 per year for up to 20 people.

Yugma (www.yugma.com). Another relative newcomer, Yugma provides desktop sharing, chat and white-boarding. It also supports VOIP conferencing, including a feature that integrates seminars with Skype calls. Presenters can use PC, Macs or Linux. Participants can use almost any system or browser by downloading a Java applet. A free, limited-functionality version allows up to 10 people to participate; more feature-rich versions start at about $200 per year for up to 20 people.

GoToMeeting/ GoToWebinar (www.gotomeeting.com). GoToMeeting is a bit more expensive, but more established, than either DimDim or Yugma, starting at $468 per year for up to 15 people. The features are comparable—it supports either phone or VOIP conferencing, but not white-boarding or video conferencing—with full support for presenters on Window PCs and limited support for Macs. Participants can use nearly any system or browser by downloading a Java applet. The GoToWebinar version supports up to 1,000 participants, adds poll-taking and integrated voice and visual recordings, and starts at $948 per year.

Acrobat Connect (/www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnect/). Adobe's take on video conferencing and online seminars is polished, and similar in features to DimDim, with desktop sharing, white-boarding, emoticons, video conferencing and VOIP conferencing. Presenters can use Mac or PCs. Participants can use any browser that runs Flash. The tool is free for up to three participants, or $395 per year for up to 15. For more participants, you'll need Acrobat Connect Pro (see below).

ReadyTalk (www.readytalk.com). ReadyTalk is reliable and widely used by nonprofits. It offers strong toll or toll-free (domestic and international) voice conferencing solutions at additional cost, and voice and visual recording features which integrate fully with the Web solutions, but no support for VOIP conferencing, white-boarding or video conferencing. Through TechSoup Stock (www.techsoup.org/stock/), nonprofits can get ReadyTalk Web conferencing tools for $45 per year for up to three participants, plus $0.15 per minute for each additional participant. The tool is also available at a flat-rate fee that starts at about $1,000 per year for hundreds of participants.