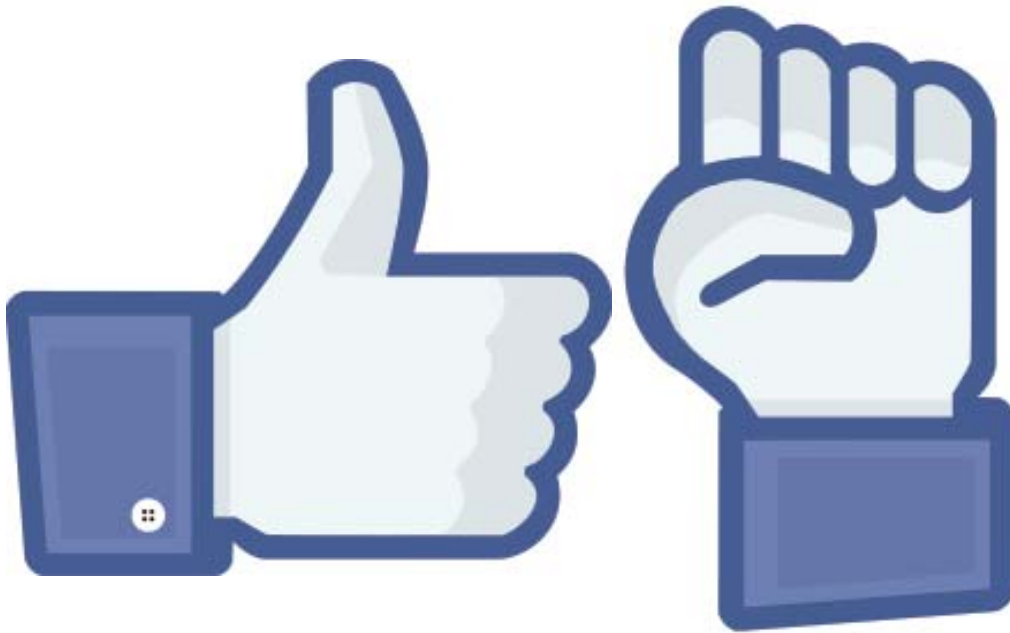


UE STEWARD

FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

UNITED ELECTRICAL, RADIO AND MACHINE WORKERS OF AMERICA • AUGUST 2019

KEEPING THE MEMBERS INFORMED



At the local's last membership meeting, Jimmie Higgins, the chief steward, complained that most of their members don't know a thing about what the union has been doing lately, and even worse, some couldn't care less. The local hadn't put out a shop leaflet since they negotiated their last contract over two years ago. And with workers pressed for time now more than ever, fewer union members are able to attend union meetings, especially in locals with members working multiple shifts, or members spread out over large geographical areas.

UE has always believed that our strength comes from the members running their union. But to do this, the members must be fully informed of what's going on in their workplace, their union, and the larger community. Keeping the members fully informed is essential to developing and maintaining strong members' participation. Without it, what often develops is an "inner circle" of a few members who know what's going on – and an apathetic membership who knows little, and cares less, about the union. What's a local union to do to keep their members informed?

In UE, many locals are doing great work of keeping their members informed, using a variety of communication tools. In this issue of the *UE Steward*, we will look at some of these

communication tools.

Newsletters and Leaflets

It is not too much to expect every local to issue a newsletter or regular informational leaflet of some type. The form and format will vary, but a regular union newsletter adds much to the life of the union and how the members view it. Newsletters are also a way of "sending a message to the boss."

Publishing a local newsletter doesn't have to be difficult. It can be elaborate and "professional looking" – or an easily-produced single sheet of paper with stories typed across the page. Don't be overly ambitious. Try something and stick with it. Some possible formats include:

- A regular newspaper-style layout (on folded, tabloid size 11 x 17" paper) with columns, headlines, and a name.
- Folding a letter-size or legal-size sheet of paper in half to make a small four-page newsletter.
- Letter or legal size paper, printed on one or both sides with no folds and simple layout.

In addition to providing general news from

your workplace, here are some time-tested ideas to consider:

- A column of questions and answers about UE;
- A comic strip drawn by a member;
- A series of articles on political issues or union history;
- A "Steward of the Month" column;
- "Speak-outs" by members on workplace issues;
- Grievance settlements.

For more information, see the UE pamphlet "Tips on Putting Out a Local Newsletter." It's reprinted at the end of Chapter 7 "Keeping the Members and the Community Informed" in the *UE Leadership Guide*.

E-Newsletters

With more members having personal computers and smartphones today, communicating with the members via the internet is one of the quickest and easiest ways to reach the members. There are a number of e-Newsletter services available for locals to use. A number of UE locals are using Mail Chimp. One of the best features of Mail Chimp is that

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you can send up to 12,000 e-mails per month to up to 2,000 subscribers for free! There are some other nice features of Mail Chimp:

1. It has email tracking technology, so after an email is sent, you can see how many people in your list opened the email, how many times people clicked a link within the email, etc.
2. It has a variety of pre-made templates into which you can copy/paste or drag/drop pictures and text, so the emails have a very clean professional look. If you want, you can even set up a customized template with a logo in it, and have all your emails look the same. All this is free.
3. There's flexibility: you can have multiple accounts, or have multiple lists on one account. Each account is associated with an email address. Then you could tailor messages to just people in a specific list.
4. It has embedded technology for sharing. One of the drag/drop features of the email templates is to add a link in your email that creates a Facebook/twitter-friendly version of the email. When people click the link on the

Facebook page to read the email, Mail Chimp also tracks that number of clicks.

Social Media

With the growth of social media in recent years, more UE locals and members are using these services, especially Facebook, to communicate. Setting up a Facebook group is pretty simple and provides another tool for a local to communicate with members. Facebook provides step-by-step instructions on how to set up a Facebook group. Someone in the local will have to be the administrator of the Facebook group. The administrator is in charge of posting information and updates and monitoring who "Likes" the page and what members are posting. If you want to control who has access to your local's Facebook group, Facebook offers different levels of privacy: public, closed, and secret.

A word of caution on using social media: you have to assume that the boss will know what is being posted on your local's Facebook page, so be careful what you and your members post, when you post it. (See the November 2018 *UE Steward*: "SOCIAL MEDIA – What to do if Your Boss Doesn't 'Like' You.")

Web Sites

A number of UE locals have web sites. If you have one or more members who are very computer-savvy, ask them to contribute their time and talent. Web sites can range from very simple statements of "who we are and how to contact us" to complex sites brimming with information. A simple web site can be very inexpensive and easy to maintain; a complex site can be much more expensive and a lot of work.

The benefits of a web site will vary by local. If a significant number of local members use the internet then you've got another means of communicating with them. If your local is going to have a web site, it's important to keep your information accurate and up-to-date. No one wants to visit a web site and see outdated information and "upcoming" events from last year. People soon lose interest in a site that's not frequently updated.

For more information on setting up a local web site, see "Troublemaking on the Home Page" in *A Troublemaker's Handbook 2* published by Labor Notes.

Tips about these communication tools

- People love to see pictures of themselves. Any time you can use pictures of members, do! However, be careful not to use pictures that have a large file size or they won't load well in emails or Facebook. (Mail Chimp also has built-in software for picture editing, including reducing file size.)
- On Facebook in particular, try to frame posts in a positive way. The site is built on generating "Likes" for content, so you want to post things that will get members to "Like" the post. Even if the boss has done something terrible, post the link to the local news story with a comment like, "I'm ready to tell Mr. Doe we're not going to take this anymore. Who's with me?" Then "Likes" become members standing in solidarity against the bad thing, not in favor of the bad news.
- Encourage sharing of content. If the local's Facebook page has a new story, the local's officers should "Share" it on their personal pages. This increases the story's "reach."
- Be very careful about the timing of using any electronic communications. Don't post or share links while you're at work unless you're on a break! The boss can see the time stamp, and you may be in trouble.