



Branch Communications Guide 2025

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Introduction



Communication is at the heart of what UNISON branches do. UNISON's strength comes from our members. It's through communication with each other that UNISON members find common causes to rally around and win.

Far too often, union communications don't reflect the fact that a union's power comes from the activity of its members. To a member, "the union" can seem like a static external body that's only there to represent you when you need it. This doesn't reflect the full range of what UNISON branches actually do – or have the potential to achieve.

This guide aims to show how branches can improve their communications to grow and empower members to win. It will explore how to craft messages that resonate with workers and create a culture of involvement and collective responsibility. The guide is not intended to be a technical "how-to" guide. Instead a "Comms & Digital" tile has been created on UNISON's Organising Space that is designed to complement the guide.

Of course, union communications should promote the full range of UNISON membership services and benefits. But they must take care not to promote or reinforce an exclusively 'servicing model'. To build branch power, communications must always aim to move people down the pathway from worker to union member to active member and activist.

This guide can help branches and activists to develop communications tools and strategies to make this happen.



The principles of union communications

Most successful union organising is a result of persuasive conversations that move people into some form of activity. This principle remains when thinking about written or digital communications.

Facilitating conversations through communications

Where capacity allows, branch communications should aim to provoke and facilitate conversations between activists and the wider membership.

When you design a leaflet, it's important to think about how it could provoke discussions with members. This could be a conversation when the leaflet is being handed out or through a link or email address that is signposted on the leaflet.

When you run a petition, think about how you can use the signatories' information to gather contact details for targeted conversations about your campaign.

Communications are not a replacement for conversations, they are a tool to make these conversations happen.

Communications = conversations

The Organising to Win guide to organising conversations guide (bit.ly/44ldXIK) provides an insight into how conversations can help your branch recruit new members and activists. At the core of these conversations is the concept of 'Anger-Hope-Action'. This is a proven technique to structure conversations to move people into union membership or participation.

Anger: Allow them to express the issues they care about and give them an outlet for frustrations that they might rarely get to air.

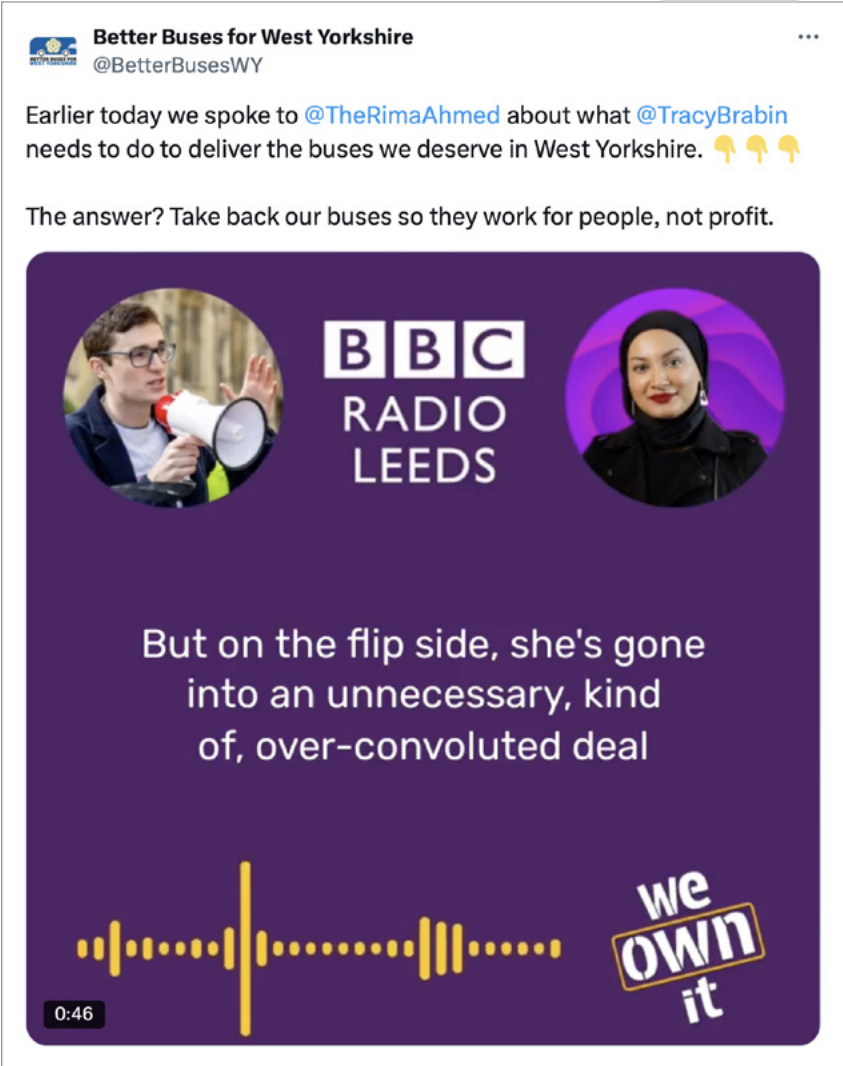
Hope: From there, start to give people hope of how this can change if they come together in UNISON.

Action: Once someone feels hopeful you help them get involved, giving them a concrete first step they can take to make change happen.

Of course, where communications differ from conversations is that they are mostly one-way conversations. The reader or viewer cannot instantly respond and you cannot ask instant follow-up questions. This is why communications on their own cannot substitute for conversations. However, effective communications can mimic the 'Anger-Hope-Action' structure.

To do so, you can use **hooks** to give people a reason to care. Hooks are a way to grab the reader's attention and provoke an emotional reaction. The best hooks are relevant to the reader, provoking their curiosity and making them want to read more.

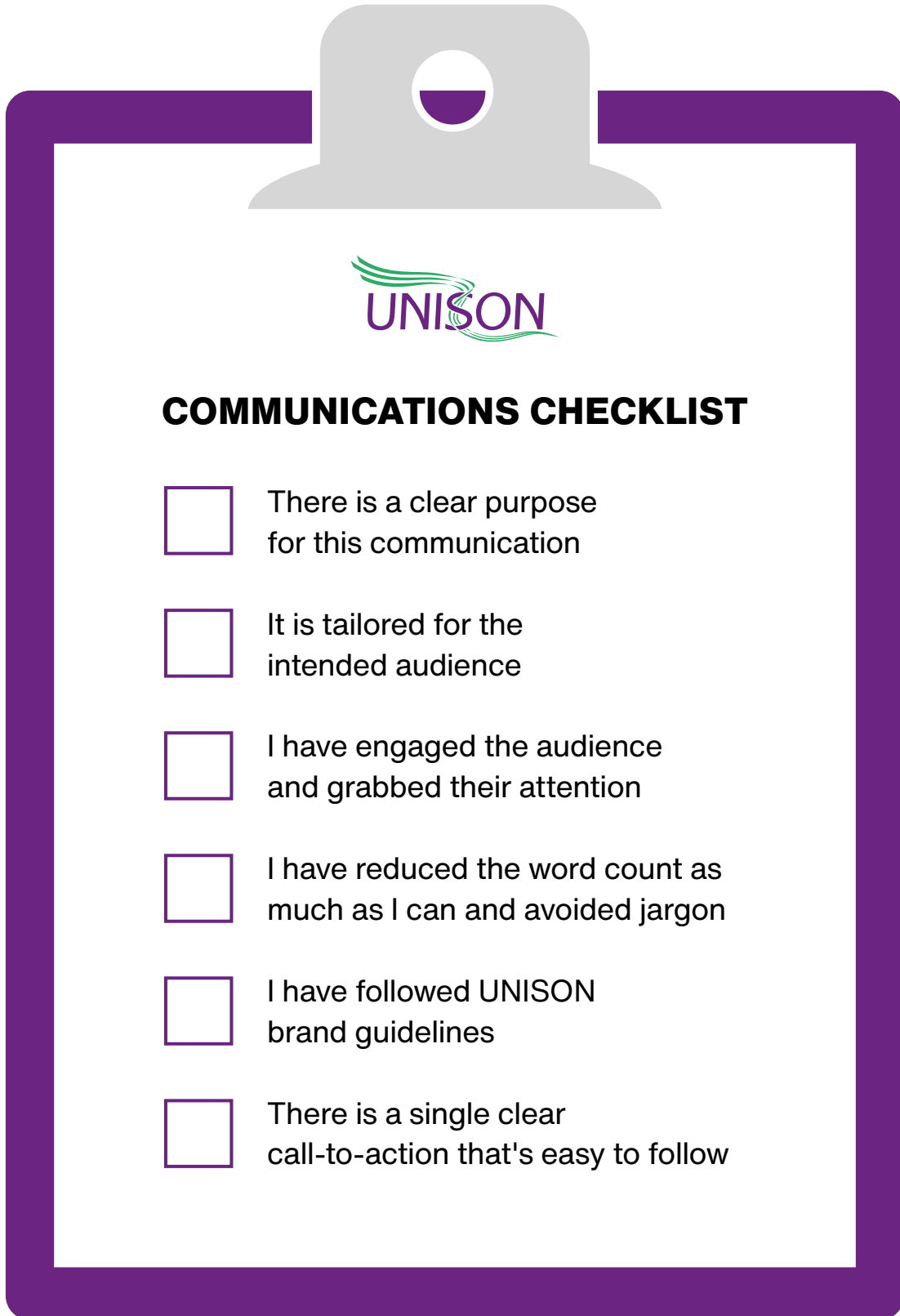
EXAMPLE



The above example mirrors the conversations that are the foundation of union activity. It demonstrates a problem in the hook, followed a collective solution and a way to get involved. The actions themselves (signing a petition, registering for a meeting, submitting a ballot) provide a concrete next step that can generate the actual one-to-one conversations that can really make a difference.

The communications checklist

The Communications Checklist below serves as a tool for all forms of communication that your branch puts out. By following the checklist, you will increase member engagement and ensure consistent best practice.



UNISON

COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

- There is a clear purpose for this communication
- It is tailored for the intended audience
- I have engaged the audience and grabbed their attention
- I have reduced the word count as much as I can and avoided jargon
- I have followed UNISON brand guidelines
- There is a single clear call-to-action that's easy to follow

Calls-to-action

Your communications should include a concrete action a reader can take instantly. Without this, you should always ask yourself whether it serves a purpose at all.

Collective communications & avoiding third partying

Anti-union employers and politicians will always present the union as a third party. **Third partying** frames the union as separate from the workplace and the members that make up the union. Members are talked about as passive service recipients. They are either served by or serving “the union”, rather than active participants in a democratic collective organisation. Branches must take care not to reinforce that same anti-union, message. It’s subtle but it frames how members and employers think about UNISON. Language matters.

The members are the union, the union is the members

Avoiding third partying is all about avoiding the idea of “the union” and “the members” being separate entities. When talking about your branches’ activity, avoid using phrases like “UNISON has done x” or “we have spoken to the employer about x”. Both examples reinforce the idea that “the union” is a professional entity that is separate from the members – rather than ordinary workers who are volunteering their time to support their colleagues.

Avoiding third partying helps to make it clear the the union is only as powerful as the members who get involved to change things. It encourages people to get involved and breaks down the barrier between a worker and those they elect to represent them.

Effective union messaging tells members “*you* are the union”, “*you* can change things”, “*you* are responsible for the branch’s successes.” This can be very tricky as much of the union movement has adopted some of this third partying language over the years and it’s become second nature.

But all experienced activists will have come across a member who claims to have been let down by ‘the union’ when awarded an inadequate pay deal. It can be very frustrating to hear this, especially when the member in question hasn’t contributed to your branch’s tireless effort in your pay campaign. This is why it’s important to get this language right.

If the union is seen as belonging to the members, and being the responsibility of the members, it would be a major step towards more people stepping-up to win together. Below are two examples of third partying by UNISON. Each has been re-written to remove the third partying and to insert the idea of worker participation.

ORIGINAL	REWRITTEN WITHOUT THIRD PARTYING
<p>Following this newsletter, we will be emailing all our members a survey to fill out, to let us know how your return to the workplace has been.</p> <p>It will be an opportunity to voice any concerns and let us know if there are any ongoing issues that you would like us to raise for you.</p>	<p>Following this newsletter, you and your colleagues will receive an email regarding your return to the workplace.</p> <p>It will be your opportunity to voice concerns and raise any issues.</p> <p>If any collective issues are raised, someone will be in touch with you and your colleagues to begin a campaign to change things.</p>
<p>It is a legal requirement that you are paid your normal pay when taking time off on holiday.</p> <p>We have received reports that you are only paid your basic contractual hours when on holiday, this means you are losing money when taking your holidays...</p> <p>UNISON will challenge this for you. We'll keep you posted.</p>	<p>It is a legal requirement that you are paid your normal pay when taking time off on holiday.</p> <p>However, the holiday pay you receive is based on basic contractual hours which means you are losing money every time you take annual leave...</p> <p>This issue won't be resolved unless you and your colleagues come together to show that you won't stand for this.</p> <p>Sign this petition now to join the campaign for fair holiday pay (LINK).</p>

Changing the way you write campaign communications will take thought and effort. It is a collective endeavour and will need constant review. As a starting point, refer to members as “you and your colleagues” without third partying “the union” as the best way to emphasise member / worker responsibility. Before you release any communication, check whether any of it third parties the union and whether it promotes the reader getting involved. Language is important but this is a guide rather than a rule.

In the case of a steward working on the shop floor with their immediate colleague, the use of ‘we’ could be appropriate. The same could not be said for someone external to that workplace like a seconded branch officer or branch-employed staff. Removing third partying in branch communications could make all the difference to how members in your branch view the union and approach their own future activity.

Testimony, testimony, testimony – the importance of member-centred communications

In communications, unions' unique selling point is the ability to give a voice to their members. One of the most powerful forms of communication is through sharing the personal testimonies of members. This approach resonates deeply for several reasons:

1. **It's easier for individuals to connect with other people than with an organisation.** When you share stories from members you demonstrate that UNISON is not a corporate organisation, but a community of ordinary working people. These stories bring to life the struggles, triumphs, and realities of public service workers, making your branch's message more tangible and relatable.
2. **Workers seeing their friends or acquaintances as the face of UNISON makes your branch feel more accessible.** It breaks down barriers and transforms the union from a distant body to a community that's relevant to their workplace. This familiarity fosters a sense of belonging and encourages more members to engage actively with the union and its activities.
3. **Your branch's unparalleled access to public service workers allows you to share human stories that other organisations cannot.** Your members are on the front lines, experiencing the impacts of local government cuts, staffing crises in the NHS, and challenges in policing. By bringing these experiences to the forefront, you can tell stories that organisations like the TUC or the Labour Party cannot.

For these reasons, it's crucial that UNISON branches place members' stories and photos at the centre of communications.

The personal touch

This principle also applies when you're sending out your communications. Where appropriate, emails, newsletters, and other materials should come from a real person rather than the branch itself. By doing this, you remind everyone that your branch is a member-led organisation, run by people who understand the experiences of people who work in the services your branch represents. This approach strengthens your message and reinforces the principle that UNISON is about its members, their stories, and their collective power.

Choosing the right tools for your goals

Understanding your audience: the key to effective communication

Effective communication begins with an understanding of your audience. UNISON members come from diverse backgrounds, each with unique needs, preferences, and challenges. Recognising these differences is crucial to crafting messages that resonate and inspire action.

Why audience segmentation matters

Audience segmentation isn't about pigeonholing members into neat categories – it's about acknowledging the rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives within our union. By considering factors like job role and digital literacy, branches can tailor their communications to be more relevant and engaging. The daily realities of a young care worker might differ from an older member working in local government administration. Recognising these differences ensures your messages are relevant and hit the mark.

People. Don't. Care.

If what they're seeing isn't relevant to the person reading it, why should they care? Wherever you can, branches need to make sure that your communications are targeted as specifically as possible to the audience that will receive it.

Why am I making this? One call-to-action.

Every time you make a poster, send an email, or post on social media, ask yourself: "What is the purpose of the communication?" "What benefit does it offer to the member or to the branch?" Think about the purpose of the communication, whether that be joining the union, getting active, voting in a ballot etc. Once you've drafted your communication, ask yourself, does everything in my communication work towards this goal?

Printed vs digital communications

The purposes of printed and digital communications are the same – to grow the union, move people into activism and to win. Both methods of communication have upsides and downsides, as demonstrated in the table below. When deciding how to communicate, it’s important that you think about the workers that you’re trying to reach. For example, printed materials are unlikely to reach community-based care workers. Is relying on digital materials in a hospital with full union access really the best way to boost the profile of the union?

PRINTED COMMUNICATIONS	DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS
More targeted	Less Targeted (unless you’re an expert!)
Visible workplace presence	Invisible in the workplace
Limited total audience	Larger total audience
Can’t reach work from home colleagues	Can reach almost anyone
Not – Multimedia	Multimedia
Allows for face-to-face conversations	Can only lead to message-based conversations
Comes with printing costs	Generally free-to-use
Harder to evaluate impact	Can evaluate impact with analysis tools

In practice on any campaign, a combination of both digital and printed communications will lead to the most effective outcomes. With both methods, the goal should be to move workers into a real-life conversation where possible.

Modes of digital communications

Digital communications are useful for three primary purposes:

- Awareness-building and moving members to participation
- Data gathering & recruitment
- Pressuring campaign targets

Before you use digital communications, think about what you are trying to achieve and consider the best way to communicate this. The table below outlines how each tool can be used for these purposes.

TOOLS	AWARENESS-BUILDING	DATA GATHERING & RECRUITMENT	PRESSURING TARGETS
Petition	✓	✓	✓
Email	✓		
Social media posts	✓		✓
Survey		✓	
Direct messaging	✓	✓	

The background features a large, abstract graphic composed of overlapping, rounded shapes. At the top left is a green shape. Below it is a light grey shape. Overlapping the grey shape is a large purple shape. Within the purple shape, there is a smaller, light grey shape. The overall composition is modern and minimalist.

Drafting a branch communications strategy

Drafting a branch communications strategy will help you to evaluate where your branch is and plan how to develop your communications over the next year. It's more than just deciding what to say; it's about understanding who you're speaking to, choosing the right platforms for your messages, skills, and capacity, and determining the best ways to engage your audience.

A good strategy ensures that your communications are consistent, effective, and aligned with the branch's' goals. It's about creating a roadmap for how information is shared and ensuring that every piece of communication – whether an email, a social media post, or a newsletter – contributes to the broader objectives of the branch.

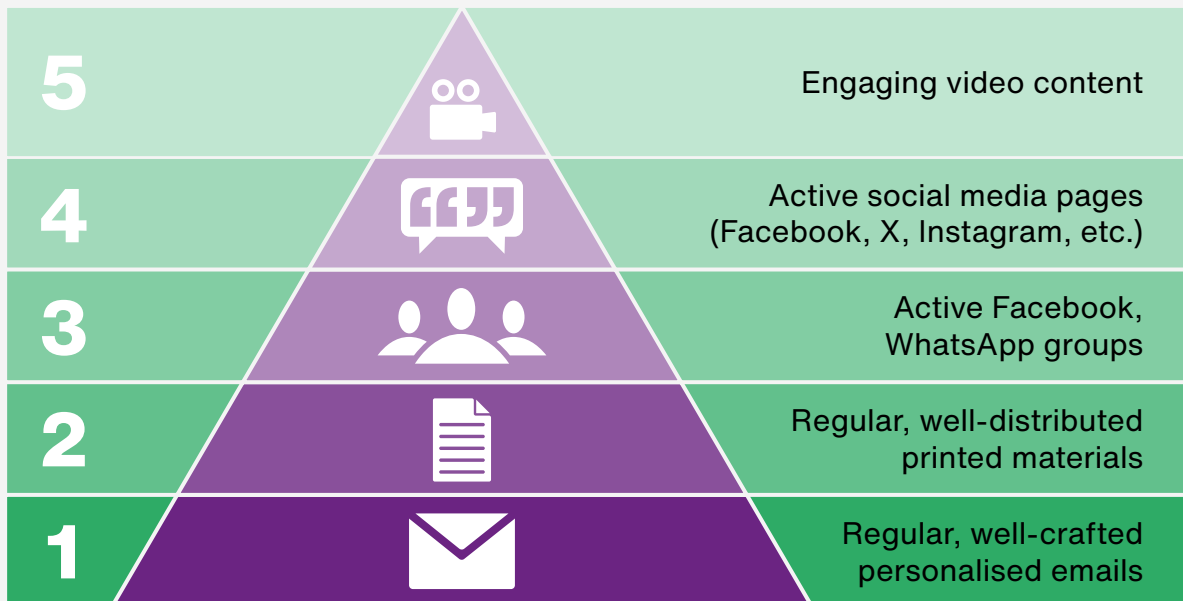
Evaluating current practices and auditing platforms

You should begin by evaluating your current communication practices. Assess the platforms you're currently using and the effectiveness of your use of these platforms. It's important to consider capacity and skills at this point. If your branch doesn't currently have the skills or capacity to do what you want to, that's okay. Just focus on the basics and make it part of your strategy to recruit somebody who can help.

Think about the platforms you use and see what needs more work. Assess email open-rates, map your workplace notice boards, evaluate your social media reach and ask yourself what needs prioritising. Do you have an old inactive Facebook account? If so, you should evaluate your resources and capacity and either shut it down or resource it properly.

The image below suggests an order of prioritisation for your branch's communications output. Email is the foundation of your communications, and the rest are more advanced levels to strive for when you've mastered the stage below.

THE UNISON BRANCH COMMUNICATIONS PYRAMID



Defining roles and responsibilities

Clear assignment of roles and responsibilities is essential for a smooth communication process. Determine who within your branch is responsible for creating, approving, and distributing all forms of communications. Is communications a standing-item on your branch committee agenda? If so, are you using this time to evaluate key performance indicators (e.g. email open rates, newsletters distributed, Facebook group members etc.) and think about improving them?

Match people's responsibilities to their skill-set and capacity, while having somebody overseeing branch communications to ensure consistency. Ensuring everyone understands their role helps maintain consistent messaging and prevents any overlap or gaps in communications.

Assessing feasibility and involving new activists

Reflect on the feasibility of your proposed communication strategy:

- Do you have the necessary resources and capacity?
- Are the tasks distributed effectively?

Involving new activists can be a great way to expand your capabilities. People can take responsibility for anything from a particular department to an employer to a whole service.

Identifying gaps in member engagement

Analyse which parts of your membership are not being effectively engaged. Are there specific groups or demographics that are consistently overlooked or underrepresented in your communications? Use your workplace mapping to identify any departments or workplaces that are less engaged. Check out the Organising to Win mapping guide [here](#).

Pinpointing these gaps will help to tailor your strategy to be more inclusive and engaging for all members. It may well be that you are under or over communicating with a certain section of your membership. This is your chance to make sure that all your communications are relevant to your target audience. You might consider conducting surveys or informal feedback sessions to gain direct insights from the members themselves.

Use the email flowchart!

All emails should follow the steps in the email checklist on page 32. This checklist ensures that every email is purposeful, clear, and aligns with your branch's overall objectives.

Developing a focused communications strategy

By having clearly defined roles and understanding your strengths and weaknesses, you're now ready to develop a focused communications strategy. This strategy should address the issues you've identified and aim to boost engagement across all segments of your membership. Set specific goals, such as improving email open rates, or a specific number of members or activists recruited through printed or digital communications.

Regularly review and adapt the strategy based on its effectiveness and ongoing member feedback. See the sample Branch Communications Strategy in Appendix 1 for inspiration. Your regional communications lead is always there if you need any guidance.



Design principles and essential tools

Why design matters

First impressions count. The visual appeal of branch materials plays a crucial role in capturing people's attention and gaining their trust. Well-designed materials reflect the seriousness and credibility of your branch, encouraging people to take your messages seriously. Good design isn't just about looking good; it's about making content accessible, engaging, and memorable. It's worthwhile comparing your branch's materials to the employers and asking yourself – which organisation is more engaging?

Basic principles of graphic design

1. Simplicity

- **Keep it clean:** Avoid cluttering your design with too much information. Stick to the essentials.
 - **Focus on the message:** Ensure that the main message and call-to-action are clear and prominent. Use concise text and straightforward visuals.
-

2. Hierarchy

- **Prioritise information:** Use different font sizes, weights, and colours to highlight the most important information first.
 - **Headlines and subheadings:** Clearly distinguish between headlines, subheadings, and body text to guide the reader's eye.
-

3. Alignment

- **Consistent alignment:** Align text and images uniformly. Left-aligned text is often easiest to read.
-

4. Space

- **Give things space:** Don't overcrowd your design. Space helps to separate different elements and makes your design more breathable and easier to read.

5. Images

- **High-quality images:** Use clear, non-blurry images. Avoid pixelated or stretched pictures.
 - **Relevance:** Ensure images support your message. They should be relevant to the content and as local and recognisable as possible to the reader.
-

6. Consistency

- **Brand guidelines:** Stick to UNISON's branding guidelines for colours, fonts, and logos.
 - **Repeated elements:** Use consistent design elements across different materials to create a cohesive identity.
-

7. Colour

- **Limit your palette:** Use 2-3 main colours to create a cohesive look. UNISON colours are available in the brand guidelines on page 64.
 - **High contrast:** Ensure there is enough contrast between text and background for readability. Black text on a white background is a classic example.
-

8. Fonts

- **Choose readable fonts:** Use simple fonts for body text. UNISON's preferred font is Helvetica. Save decorative fonts for headlines.
 - **Limit font varieties:** Stick to 2-3 fonts in a design to maintain visual coherence.
-

9. Accessibility

- **Accessibility Guide:** Reference the accessibility guidelines on page 61.
-

10. Feedback

- **Seek opinions:** Before finalising your design, get feedback from a few colleagues to ensure clarity and impact. Be open to making changes based on the feedback you receive.
-

You can view UNISON's style guide in full here: bit.ly/4bmCe9M

Essential tools

Canva for union communications

When it comes to making posters, flyers, and newsletters, many of our union activists find [Canva](#) really helpful. Canva is a simple design tool you can use on your web browser, desktop or mobile phone. Canva is just one possible design tool, but a lot of UNISON branches find it easier-to-use than most other design platforms. Canva has a lot of ready-made templates that you can change to suit your needs. This means you don't have to be an expert in design to make something that looks professional.

You can learn more about using Canva [here](#).

UNISON Canva Templates

On the Comms & Digital section of the Organising Space, you can find some [templates in Canva](#) designed for use by branches. They're a good starting point for making your own posters, flyers and newsletters. You can change them to fit what your branch needs.

Note how these templates suggest a limited word-count. This is a deliberate choice to make sure that materials are easily digestible and visually engaging. There's often a lot to tell members but ask yourself:

- “Is every piece of it relevant to the members who will see it?”
- “Can I say it more succinctly?”
- “Could I hold one item for the next newsletter or for a more targeted one?”

Easy to use and share

Canva templates are easy to use and share. This can help to keep your branch's materials consistent, building your visual identity across workplaces. Canva also lets several people work on a design together, which can be very useful.

Canva is just one option

Remember, Canva is just one choice. There are other tools out there too and the most appropriate tool might change over time. Whether you use Canva or another tool, it's the content that really counts. The designs on the Organising Space, and the ability to easily share templates branches make Canva the best tool for the job at the moment.

Don't forget you can email the graphic designers at the UNISON centre on design@unison.co.uk if you get stuck and need design advice.

Using QR codes and short links

Why use short links and QR codes?

When we share information with our members, sometimes we want to direct them to more details online, like a survey, a sign-up page, or an important document. Web addresses (URLs) can be long and hard to remember or type. That's where short links and QR codes come in handy.

Using Bit.ly for Short Links

[Bit.ly](#) is a free tool that lets you turn a long web address into a short one. This is great for printed materials because a short link is easier for members to type into their phones or computers. For example, a long link like www.ourbranch.org/events/2024/conference-details can be shortened to something like: bit.ly/unionconf24.

Creating QR Codes

You can create a QR code either directly on Canva or on bit.ly when you create your short link. When readers scan the QR code with their phone, they're taken directly to the page you're directing them to. Once you have your QR code, you can easily add it to any design you're making.

On Canva, take the QR code and put it where you want it on your poster or flyer. This way, you keep your design looking good without filling it with long web addresses.

QR codes and short links: tools for conversation

By using QR codes and short links, you make it easier for members to access further information or take part in actions. This allows a one-way communication method like a poster, to become a two-way conversation by allowing the reader to sign-up for activity, sign a petition or fill out a survey. At this point, the reader can be contacted by an activist for a conversation.

As with Canva, Bit.ly for short links and QR codes is just one way to do this – there are other tools available. The important thing is making it easy for members to get more information and get involved.

Example: member voice-focused newsletter

EXAMPLE



Newsletter
September 2025

LAST MONTH UNISON MEMBERS WON A HUGE PAY RISE



Workers at EMPLOYER were sick and tired of years of below average pay rises. Last year, they got together with their UNISON branch and planned a campaign to win the pay rise they deserve.

The UNISON members launched a petition, recruited their colleagues and balloted for strike action. Once the vote was in their employer offered a 10% pay rise, outmatching any offers of the last five years!

Join Today



join.unison.org.uk

WHO WE ARE

UNISON is the trade union for public service workers in INSERT EMPLOYER/SECTOR.

In UNISON, workers stand together to build power and win improvements to our pay, conditions and working lives.


Health and Safety Campaign



Recently, branch officers have received a higher number of complaints regarding health and safety issues at work. It's vital that UNISON members get together to change this.

ACTION: If you want to step up to help change things, contact the branch on the email address below.

📞 0111 111 1111 | ✉ branch@employer.uk



Writing effective emails

Emails allow branches to contact members wherever and whenever. They are branches' most powerful and efficient method of communication, and their importance has only increased as working-from-home has become more commonplace. They also offer a way to communicate with those members who are based in inaccessible workplaces like in schools or GP clinics or care workers based in the community.

The relative ease of digital communications, compared to workplace visits, make it tempting to produce one-size-fits-all communications for all members. UNISON activists are usually very busy so a quick email to all is understandably tempting – but there's huge competition.

Surprising email facts

- The average person gets approximately 1 email every 12 minutes.
- 40% of email users have at least 50 unread messages in their inboxes.
- 47% of email recipients decide whether to open an email or not based on its subject line.
- The average marketing email open rate is 21.5%.

It can be tempting to think that people will care more about emails from their union, and there's some truth in that. However, if members receive emails that aren't relevant to them or don't speak to their interests, the open rate will go down and your future emails will go unread.

This guide is intended to help your branch to use email to keep members engaged and informed. Changing how you send emails could be the difference between retaining or losing a member or winning or losing a campaign. It's vital to make the most of them.

Are you emailing the right people?

Sending regular branch update emails to all members is the most efficient way of making sure everyone has access to all information. But it's also the most efficient way to make sure that nobody actually reads them. If you're a nurse, do you need *every* update about the latest goings on in the outsourced security workers campaign? If you're a low-paid care worker for a private company, would you really want to read about the pay claims of those who are already significantly better off than you?

Targeting recipients more precisely helps to avoid these mistakes. It also allows your subject lines to be more personalised and the body of your email to be shorter and more digestible. Checking that your email is relevant to everyone who receives it is an easy way to increase the interest in your branch's emails, even if it means those emails are a bit less frequent.

Are you asking too much of people?

Getting people to open your email is hard enough. Getting people to click through to a link is harder. Getting people to take multiple actions within a single email is nigh-on impossible.

As a rule, effective emails contain ONE call-to-action. You're competing with the rest of the internet for someone's attention- your email should be interesting, easy to digest and easy to act on (clear links etc.). People are much more likely to take an action if it is the only thing they are asked to do. The email should be geared towards moving the reader towards that one action.

Have two things? You could consider sending the less urgent one another day. Equally, if there is no call-to-action whatsoever in your email, then you might consider if the email is necessary at all. If a member only receives updates without opportunities to get involved, they might never consider getting active in their union.

Subject lines – earn that open

Subject lines are the most crucial factor in deciding whether your email will be opened or not. Writing a subject line that induces curiosity is an important skill when emailing members.

There are four key criteria to composing an effective subject line. Subject lines should be:

1. **Personalised:** tailoring the subject line to the recipient, using their name or referencing their specific role or workplace. The more specific, the better.
2. **Curiosity-inducing:** the subject line should pique interest, making the recipient want to open the email to learn more. Instead of “Branch AGM Details”, you could use “It’s your union, come along and have your say.”
3. **Concise:** keeping it short ensures that the subject line is readable, especially on mobile devices. If they can’t read it all in their notification preview, it’s too long.
4. **Tested:** experiment with different styles and formats to see what works best with your audience. Different techniques might work for one group of members and not others. Review your open rates to inform your future practice.

DON'T SAY	DO SAY
AGM 2024 – 28 September 2025	EMPLOYER NAME staff, have your say in the plan for the next year.
NHS Pay contacts Jun 25	EMPLOYER NAME workers, here's one thing you can do to win an NHS pay rise.
Staff survey 2025	How are things at WORKPLACE?
Update your details for upcoming ballot	Do you still work at WORKPLACE?

Data Protection - Email Do's and Don'ts

- DO use WARMS whenever you are sending a bulk email (any email to a large group about a single topic).
- DO use WARMS whenever you are sending out marketing emails. WARMS has member's consents built in, so we won't accidentally send marketing emails to people who have opted out.
- DON'T use lists or extracts outside of WARMS/RMS unless it is absolutely necessary. This data should NEVER be used for marketing emails and any list should be password protected and destroyed as soon as it has been used for the purpose it was created.
- DO head over to the Organising Space where there is further guidance on sending communications compliantly. The team at UNISON Centre is also happy to help and can be contacted at dataprotection@unison.co.uk

Writing the body of the email

Once you have your subject line and you've decided your one call-to-action, the next step is crafting an email that is focused on moving people to taking that action. Emails work best when they are framed like a conversation. Ideally, it should be written from an individual rather than in the name of your branch. It doesn't really matter who it is, it's more about giving it that personal touch (if it can be signed by a person the recipients know or can relate to that works even better).

Anger, Hope, Action

Like with organising conversations, "Anger, Hope, Action" can be deployed to craft an effective email.

Anger:

- What is the issue and why does it matter?
- Are you provoking an emotional response to the current unfair situation?

Hope:

- How can UNISON activity provide a solution to the issue?

Action:

- What is the one thing the reader can do to start the process of change? This could be signing a petition, returning a ballot, becoming an activist...
- How does the reader do this now? Provide an obvious link or clear instructions.

As with all communications, your email should be concise. People's online attention spans are short – review your emails and cut your text to a minimum. It's also important to avoid jargon and keep your language simple. Never assume that your readers understand acronyms or trade union terms, even if you use them every day.

Example email 1: What to avoid

FROM: Normaltown UNISON

Subject: Normaltown UNISON Update

Dear Member,

We are reaching out to inform you that the branch has been in discussions regarding the current pay offer presented by management. After extensive deliberations, we have concluded that the proposed terms do not meet the expectations set forth for the welfare of our members.

The union has decided to initiate a consultative ballot and we're urging members to participate and vote 'no' against the proposed pay offer. Please follow the guidance provided by the branch to ensure that the union's voice is heard.

Please be reminded that UNISON is committed to securing the best possible outcome for you and is actively working on your behalf to negotiate terms that are in the best interest of UNISON members.

The branch is happy to provide further clarification or assistance regarding the ballot process. We appreciate your attention to this matter and your continued support for the union.

Please click on the link below to vote now:

<https://app.alchemer.eu/distribute/share/id/90675095>

Young Members' AGM

If you know any members aged 30 and under, please invite them to the regional young members AGM at 7pm on Thursday 7th of September, Arena Point – 1 Hunts Bank, Manchester, M3 1UN.

Best regards,

Normaltown UNISON

From
Comes from the branch rather than a person. Seems corporate and impersonal, makes the email look generic.

Subject line
Not personalised. Doesn't reflect the content. Doesn't speak to members' interests or invoke curiosity.

Greeting
Not personalised.

Third partying
The email uses third partying language throughout. Words like "we" and terms like "the union" make the branch seem separate from the members reading it. If you read this, you wouldn't recognise that the union is a democratic collective of members that everyone can get involved in. Instead, it looks like "the union" is doing things for members, implying there's no need to get involved.

Length
The email is very long and features long paragraphs. A reader might get bored and give up.

Link
The link is long, not too prominent and occurs towards the end of the email. The link text doesn't contain anything that references the ballot or UNISON – people might think it's spam.

Two Calls-to-Action and Targeting
This should be a separate email targeted and addressed to young members in the branch.

Signature
Formal and impersonal

Example email 2: What to include

FROM: Elaine, Normaltown UNISON

Subject: EMPLOYER NAME workers, vote now on your pay offer

Dear NAME,

As you might be aware, your branch officers have been involved in negotiations on this year's pay offer at EMPLOYER.

The talks have now come to a halt.

The employer's offer of a 2% pay rise does not reflect the hard work you and your colleagues have put in this year.

For that reason, your elected branch officers are recommending you vote to REJECT this offer and move to a formal ballot for strike action.

[CLICK HERE TO VOTE NOW](#)

If enough of you vote to reject this offer, it will send a clear message to your employer that their offer simply isn't good enough.

If you want to reject this deal, click the link and vote today. Feel free to check if your colleagues have done the same.

[CLICK HERE TO VOTE NOW](#)

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reply to this email.

Yours,

Elaine Singleton
Branch Secretary
Normaltown UNISON
0191 324 5874

From
Comes from a person. Seems more relatable and personal.

Subject line
Personalised. Urgent. Addresses the member's interests directly.

Greeting
Personalised.

Third partying
The email addresses members directly and tells them that they are in control. Terms like "you and your colleagues" show the importance of member involvement. Branch officers are referred to as "elected branch officers" rather than "the union" or "we".

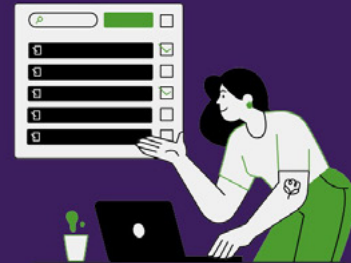
Links
The email has two links that clearly stand out from the rest of the text.

Length and Tone
The email is shorter with more paragraph breaks. It uses emotive language to hook the reader and follows the "Anger-Hope-Action" structure.

Signature
Invites response in a quick and easy way. Signed by an individual, informing recipients of their branch position and contact details.



Effective Emails: A Flow Chart



Organising to Win

WHY ARE YOU SENDING THIS?



- What is the purpose of sending the email? Are you sure the recipients will find it useful or interesting?
- Only have one action for the recipient to take. Have more? Send a second email another day.

IS IT GOING TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE?



- Is the email interesting to everyone who'll receive it, or just to a small portion of them?
- Could it be sent to a smaller, more targeted audience?

INTRODUCTION



- Do you address the issue in the subject line?
- Do you immediately provoke emotion? (Remember: Anger-Hope- Action)

WHY WOULD YOU OPEN THIS EMAIL?



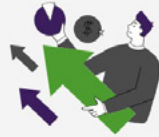
- Does your subject line intrigue recipients?
- Is it as relevant as possible to the audience?

CONTENT



- Is it structured for easy reading using short paragraphs?
- Is the language clear, concise and free of jargon?

CALL-TO-ACTION



- Is there a compelling reason to take the action?
- Is the action clearly sign-posted and easy to perform?

PROOF READING



- Have you proofread the email? Check for grammar, punctuation and third-partying.
- Are all links and resources correctly included?

SIGNATURE



- Is the e-mail personable and relatable - from one member to another?
- Is it clear how to reply or get in touch?

ANALYSIS

Track the open-rates and conversions:

- What style of subject lines work?
- What times of day are best?
- Is there a group of workers that are more or less engaged than others? Why is this the case?

IMPLEMENT BEST-PRACTICE

- Use your analysis to find out what works best for each group of workers.
- Use this to form a bespoke email strategy to best engage members across your branch.





Petitions and surveys

Petitions

Petitions are a great tool for union campaigns. They serve two purposes. The first is to put pressure on a decision-maker by demonstrating the strength and breadth of feeling on the issue. The second is to, within GDPR rules, allow activists to gather data of people who are interested in a campaign. This data can be used to:

- Recruit non-members by giving them a call for a recruitment conversation by asking for membership status
- Identify areas of strength and weakness by asking for their workplace or department
- Update member details ahead of a ballot (explicit permission to do this must be given by the member in question)
- Measure engagement by members and identify potential activists.

To execute these opportunities effectively, it's important that you dedicate resources to following-up petition signatories. Doing so gives you a huge opportunity to grow the union and make your campaign more effective. To be more effective, leads from petitions, or other actions such as surveys, should be followed up within 24 – 48hrs. Make sure to always include a disclaimer in your petition, or survey that makes clear that data may be used to contact the respondent.

EXAMPLE

The image displays an example of a petition campaign. On the left is a flyer with the UNISON logo at the top. The main heading is 'GREATER MANCHESTER: GIVE CARE WORKERS A PAY RISE'. Below this, it states: 'We are Greater Manchester's care and support workers. We provide exceptional care within care homes, homecare and supported living services across our city's ten local authorities. We worked tirelessly during the pandemic to care for Greater Manchester – but does Greater Manchester care about us?' It then explains that thousands of workers are paid less than the Foundation Living Wage (£9.90) and are 'under-valued, under-appreciated and under-paid'. A quote from Mayor Andy Burnham is included: 'Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, has committed to Greater Manchester becoming a Living Wage City-Region and called for care and support workers to receive a "massive pay rise" – and now care and support workers across the city are coming together to turn those ambitions into reality.' The flyer concludes with 'We are Greater Manchester's care and support workers. And we demand a pay rise.' On the right is a digital sign-up form titled '121' with the heading 'Fill in your details below:'. It includes fields for 'First name', 'Last name', 'Email Address', and 'Postcode'. It also has several yes/no questions: 'Are you a care worker based in Greater Manchester?', 'Are you a UNISON member?', 'Are you a social care service user?', and 'Are you a councillor or MP?'. A final question asks for consent to be contacted about the campaign. A 'SIGN PETITION' button is at the bottom.

When to use a petition

Petitions can be deployed in the early stages of a campaign to test support for an issue or later in a campaign to build wider support and put pressure on a decision-maker. As experienced activists know, petitions in themselves are unlikely to win a tough campaign. The launch of a petition needs to be used strategically to harness the data to grow your campaign and engage as many people as possible.

Petition Platforms

The platforms you use for your petitions depend on what you're using them for. For data-gathering, we must use our own systems that provide full access to the data for follow-up. For targeting a particular decision-maker, TUC's Megaphone platform is great.

The TUC promote your campaign on your website, and signatures can automatically generate emails to the decision maker, helping to mount pressure on them.

Find out more at megaphone.org.uk.

Surveys

Surveys are a great way to measure the strength and depth of feeling about an issue across a workforce. They can be used to identify campaigns, carry-out consultative ballots, or direct broader branch activity. Like petitions, surveys can be used to update data, recruit non-members, identify activists and target campaigns. They can also direct your broader communications by finding out what exactly it is about an issue that resonates most with the workers involved.

Crafting a good survey

To craft a good survey, take the following steps:

- Know your audience and make sure all questions are relevant.
- Make it as short as possible. You can use question logic so that respondents only see some questions depending on their answers to previous questions.
- Set a clear deadline for responses.
- Have a clear plan on what you want to do with the data once the survey is closed.

Name

Gathering names as separate first and last names makes the data easier to look up on membership systems

Ward/ Department

Assists with mapping and identifying potential recruitment targets.

Suggested Issues

The survey suggests issues that prompt people to think about their situation, while also allowing them a write-in option for anything else.

Checkboxes

Allows the user to select more than one option.

Membership Check

Helps to identify any potential recruitment opportunities and further assists with mapping.

Radio Buttons

Best for when answers can only be one or another option.

Contact Details

Essential for contacting members and can be used to update details on membership systems (with members' permission).

Question Logic

These boxes only appear if one or both answers for question 6 are ticked. This makes the survey shorter for those who don't tick and so makes it more likely that they complete and submit the survey.

Survey platforms

There are a variety of platforms you can use to build surveys. Microsoft Forms and Alchemer are two good examples: <https://forms.office.com> and <app.alchemer.eu>.



Creating effective printed materials

Always encourage participation

Every piece of material you distribute should contain a concrete action the readers can take. Printed materials should focus on encouraging people to take this action and they should be designed and written accordingly. They should move the reader towards clearly signposted contact details, QR codes and links that allow the reader to take the desired action.

Start a conversation

Think of your printed materials as the start of a conversation. Firstly, it's important to engage the reader. When designing materials, think about the activist handing it to their colleague or how it looks on a noticeboard. Ask yourself:

- Would I stop to read it?
- Would it provoke a conversation between colleagues or is it easy to ignore?

Don't be afraid to use bold statements and attention-grabbing images to get the conversation started. It's better to be bold and noticed than cautious and ignored.

EXAMPLE

WORKPLACE- GET READY FOR MARCH 8TH!



UNISON NHS MARCH & RALLY

Reserve your place. Scan the QR code or type in the link below:



<http://bit.ly/3XRKAir>

FREE LUNCH PROVIDED!

March from TOWN Square to the Beaumont Hotel for a rally with UNISON General Secretary Christina McAnea and strikers from across the REGION.

Coach will depart from picket lines at 11.30AM and return by 3PM.

Local, relevant, effective

Relevance is key. Materials should resonate as much as possible with the specific concerns and culture of each workplace or department. This might mean tailoring content to address local issues or using images and language that reflect the workplace or the people in it. When members see their daily realities reflected in union materials, or recognise photos of their colleagues on them, they're more likely to feel a personal connection and take the action you want them to take.



Effective distribution networks

Distributing posters, flyers or newsletters is a great opportunity for activists to start conversations – recruiting new starters and building campaigns. To maximise impact, branches can create distribution networks for materials. Keep a list of any key noticeboards or workplaces to make sure they are always up-to-date and relevant. Activists can be made responsible for refreshing noticeboards and distributing leaflets in allocated areas. Boosting union visibility and keeping information up-to-date shows that the union is a serious, reliable and relevant part of the workplace.



**Social media:
creating a
conversation**

Social media is a great avenue for communicating with members and the wider public. However, unlike many other organisations, it's important to remember that for trade unions likes, clicks and views are not everything. UNISON's social media is about empowering people to get involved and make a change in their lives – a bigger commitment than an impulse purchase off Instagram!

Unions focus on the harder job of moving people from social media interactions into real life workplace activity. Social media is a tool that can facilitate those deeper more meaningful conversations and actions that really make a difference.

This guide won't detail the technicalities of social media – different platforms are constantly changing their look and layout so we could never keep up. You can always find some great 'how-to' videos on YouTube- or you could ask a question in the Organising Space.



Understanding your audience – what is your niche?

When building a social media following, it's important to remember that all social media groups and pages have their own niche. Ask yourself: "Why would somebody engage with this?" and "Why would somebody want to share this with their friends?"

As campaigning and political organisations, UNISON branches' activity is varied and focused on a wide range of issues. As well as your day-to-day work, branches campaign on important issues like anti-racism, climate change, electoral politics and more. This means it can be hard to judge what is and isn't appropriate for your social media channels. The best way to think about this is by asking yourselves – 'What can our branch do better than anyone else?'

The answer is simple – tell members' stories.

Compared to dedicated politics pages, you're not going to be the go-to place for news and opinion on the big topic of the day. People don't follow union branches for that, others do it better. But what your branch can do, that nobody else can, is give a voice to the people on the front line, running public services in your community. UNISON members know first-hand the effects of low pay in public services, the impacts of austerity and outsourcing and the extent of the crisis in social care.

If you want people to engage with your branch online, you need to speak to what you and your members know better than anyone else. If done well, you can use social media to demonstrate the good work your branch is doing, grow your membership, recruit more activists, and give a platform to the realities of being a public service worker in the UK.

Telling members' stories

Putting individual members' stories at the forefront of your posts will allow you to grow and connect with your audience. When people see other people working in jobs like their own, they are much more likely to engage with your content in the future.

Here are some examples of posts that fit the bill:

TYPE OF POST	CONTENT IN THE POST	POSSIBLE CALL-TO-ACTION(S)
New Joiner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo/video of the member • Who are they? Where do they work? • Short quote about why they joined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join UNISON link
New Activist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo/video of the activist. • Who are they? Where do they work? • Short quote on why they got active. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to a sign-up form to speak to the branch about getting involved. • Link to sign-up to a course.
Striking Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo/video of the member. • Who are they? Where do they work? • What's the strike about? • Short quote on why the strike is important to them, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Post your messages of support below." • Donate to the strike fund • Sign this petition... • Write to your MP/Councillor etc.
Branch/UNISON Campaigns (Equalities, Labour Link, environmental or other political campaigns.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo/video of a member affected by the issue. • Who are they? Where do they work? • How does the issue affect them? • Short quote on why the issue is important to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign-up form to get involved in campaign • Sign this petition... • Write to your MP/councillor etc.
Get out the vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo/video of a member who has voted. • Who are they? Where do they work? • Short quote on why they voted and why others should vote. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote now • Link to a form to let the branch know they've voted • Share with/tag 5 friends who haven't voted. • Comment "voted" below.
Win celebration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo/video of a member who has won a dispute, award, financial settlement etc. • Who are they? Where do they work? • Short quote on how their UNISON membership or activism led to their win. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join UNISON link. • Link to 'get involved' form.

The building blocks of a good social media post

Captions

Your written captions should be short and to the point. The Twitter limit of 240 characters should be considered a strict upper limit across all platforms- but generally the shorter your caption, the better the engagement. If your caption is for a graphic, image or video that contains the important information, there's no need to repeat this information in the caption. Using catchy phrases like "This says it all", strong, clear statements like "It's time our teaching assistants got a pay rise" or even a simple emoji will invoke more curiosity.

Images and Videos

Images and videos of relatable members are the gold standard for trade union social media. Take a picture that's bright (it's best if the main light source is behind the person with the camera) and clearly focused on the person or people that you're posting about. Don't worry if your picture isn't the best – any picture is better than none-at-all.

For videos, rewatch them before you post to make sure you can hear the sounds you want the viewers to hear. Where you can, caption the videos. The vast majority of social media videos are watched without sound. If someone is talking without captions, your video will likely be skipped.

You can find a lot of tips on taking images and videos on the Comms & Digital section of the Organising Space ([organising.space.unison.org.uk](https://organising.space/unison.org.uk)).

Graphics

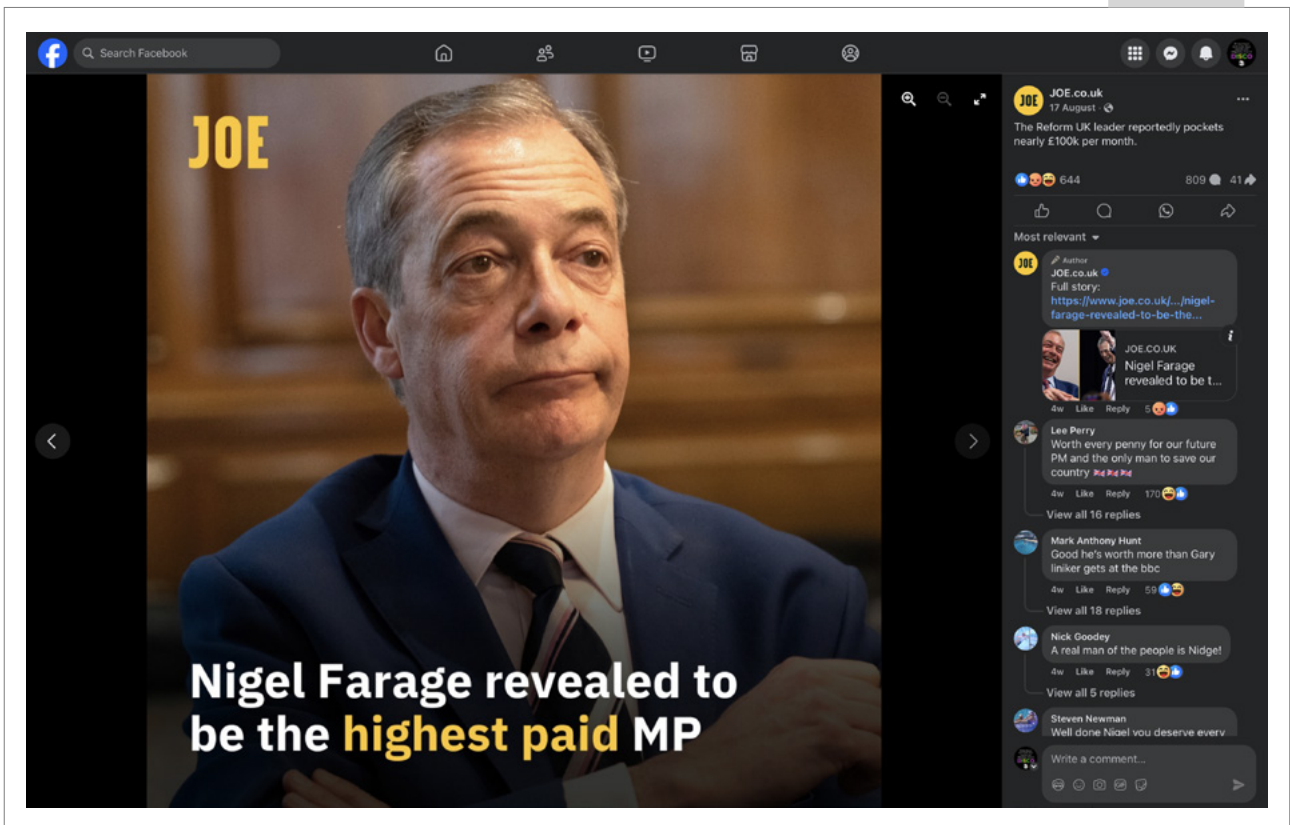
When making graphics, make sure to use the UNISON style guide to maintain a recognisable identity. Make sure that your graphics don't contain too much information and ask yourself "would I stop to look at this if I was browsing social media"?

Calls-to-action

Your calls to action should be aimed at moving people into membership or activity. This could be asking for a comment or reply on the platform that could lead to a direct message conversation. Alternatively, you may want them to visit a link.

Social media platforms hate you posting links – a good workaround is to post links in the comments or replies of your main post. Outlets like JOE.co.uk are experts at converting captions and graphics into link clicks.

EXAMPLE



Groups vs Pages

Effective trade union social media can be broken down into two main categories: pages and groups.

GROUPS	PAGES
<p>Groups are closed spaces where people communicate as individuals, usually in their own name.</p> <p>They're for members only, and you need to join them to see what's going on inside and to contribute.</p> <p>You can use groups to have two-way conversations, share ideas, and work together on specific things.</p> <p>Group administrators are responsible for setting up and enforcing their own group rules.</p>	<p>Pages facilitate public announcements from the branch, in the branch's name.</p> <p>Anyone can see what's on them, even if they're not members of your branch.</p> <p>You can use pages to share important updates, events, and news with everyone who follows you and your followers can share and pass that message on.</p>
<p>Examples: Facebook Groups, WhatsApp Groups</p>	<p>Examples: Facebook Pages, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok</p>

So where should you start?

As pages are an official mouthpiece of the branch, it is probably a good idea to be sure that you can run a page well before you set it up. In comparison, starting off by using groups offers several advantages:

1. Groups are simpler to manage than pages, requiring less effort to keep them active – it's not just on one person to make regular announcements. Moderating posts can be tricky – but is much less time consuming than quality regular posting.
2. Groups don't have to bear the branch's name; they can be named after workplaces, employers, or specific campaigns. This means there is less risk of reputational damage if the group becomes inactive and people don't get a response.
3. Creating a group dedicated to a particular campaign can be a good way to experiment with social media. After the campaign is finished, the group can be either deleted or transformed into something broader to include a wider group of members.



Crafting a community: using Facebook groups

Who's your group for?

When setting up a new Facebook group you first have to choose your intended audience. Do you want to target a particular workplace, employer, or all your members?

Once this is decided, you need to pick a name. Consider that groups in the name of an employer or workplace will attract more non-members than one in the name of the branch, but this means more groups and more work. This is why experimenting with one workplace to begin with might be a good idea.

Remember, no online space is ever 100% secure. All online conversations can be screenshotted and shared, no matter how "private" the conversations. It's important for activists, members and workers are aware of this and continually reminded of the risks.

Setting group rules

On Facebook, you can set rules that group members must agree to before joining. This is important as it gives legitimacy to admins when they remove comments or members that contravene the rules. Below are some suggested group rules:

- Welcome to [**Name of Group**]. This is a space to chat to colleagues and friends at [**employer/workplace**].
- This group is an open space, but if your post falls into any of the categories below, we'll have to remove it:
 - Graphic, obscene, racist or discriminatory content
 - Comments that are abusive, hateful or intended to defame or libel any person or any organisation.
- Keep all discussion respectful so that everyone feels able to participate. Any personal attacks will be removed.
- Advertisements or promotion of anything not related to the subject of the group.
- You participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your comments.
- Be aware that your comments could be seen and reported elsewhere and shouldn't contravene employer's social media code of conduct.

Finding your audience

Mapping your workplaces is a key tool in union organising and this is no different when you organise online. Taking the example of building a Facebook Group, how can you expect it to grow in the relevant community? This is where mapping and using your existing relationships come in. After you've set up the group, think about who you want to include and start adding them in.

If you're using your own Facebook account, this will allow you to use your friends list to invite the right people to your group. You can then message these friends to ask them to invite anyone relevant that they might know. You can also email a link to the Facebook group to the members you want to join.

Creating a community

Once you've built a big enough base, the next step is to make your space interesting and relevant to members. One way to do this is to use polls or open questions to encourage participation. You could ask what department people work in or what job they do.

Short interactive posts really help to boost engagement and can also provide information to inform your next steps. For example, you could see where you're underrepresented and arrange a visit or contact a member who works there.

Alternatively, if a department is disproportionately well-represented in the group, it's worth considering the reasons. Is there an active member or steward? If not, you might be able to identify a potential activist who might already be influencing people into engaging with the union.

From here, the group should start to gain some life as people start to share more and more into the group. At this point, you can use the techniques on pages 42-45 to write posts keep people engaged and make the most of this new online community.



Social media pages

Does your branch really need one?

Social media can be a brilliant way to communicate and get people involved, but it only works if it's done right. When thinking about whether your branch should have its own social media pages, it's important to consider a few key points.

Can your branch post regularly enough?

Social media pages must be updated regularly. If a page doesn't have regular fresh content, it won't catch people's attention or keep them interested. It's like having a noticeboard that never changes – people will stop looking and the algorithm will punish your inactivity by limiting how many people see your future posts.

Look at the table on page 43. Do you think your branch can produce quality posts that match those standards regularly? You'll need people in your branch to make taking pictures and videos an everyday practice, and somebody will need to learn how to create graphics, write captions and caption videos.

Do you *really* want to create another way for members to communicate with you?

Pages are not just about putting things out there. The inbox and replies of the page will need monitoring. People might send messages asking for urgent assistance or wanting to get involved. If no one replies, it doesn't look good and you may lose a member or take a reputational hit.

You can post elsewhere

If you don't have social media but you have a win to celebrate, or an important campaign that needs more exposure, you can always contact your region or service group to ask them to promote on their platforms.

Comparing Platforms

When considering which social media platforms to use, it's important to think about what each one offers and how it fits with what the branch needs and the amount of time you can put in.

PLATFORM	ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES
Facebook Pages	<p>Facebook is the most widely-used platform across all adult age groups. This makes it a great place to reach as many people as possible.</p> <p>People use their real names, so it's easier to chat and connect with them. It's also got a good system for ads, which can help get messages to the right people.</p> <p>Be aware, if a Facebook Page doesn't post often, Facebook might not show your posts to many people – accounts are rewarded for regular posting.</p>
Twitter/X	<p>Twitter is far less widely-used than Facebook, but those who are there tend to really get involved.</p> <p>It's not the best for recruiting new members or getting people to do things, but it's good for public-facing campaigns, like promoting petitions or conducting targeted campaigns.</p>
Instagram	<p>Instagram is more popular with younger users and is all about pictures. It's good for showing what's happening in a fun and visual way. But, because it's all about images, you need to make sure your photos and graphics are really good.</p>
TikTok	<p>TikTok is growing fast and increasingly popular, especially with younger people. But, it's hard to get people to do more than just watch videos; turning views into action isn't easy.</p> <p>It takes a lot of work to make regular good video content. Right now, it might be too much effort for a UNISON branch, unless you've got the time and ideas to make it work.</p>

Setting up your page

For every social media page, what works is building a reputation for doing what you do better than others. For UNISON branches, focusing on your branch's members and the issues that affect them is the way to achieve this.

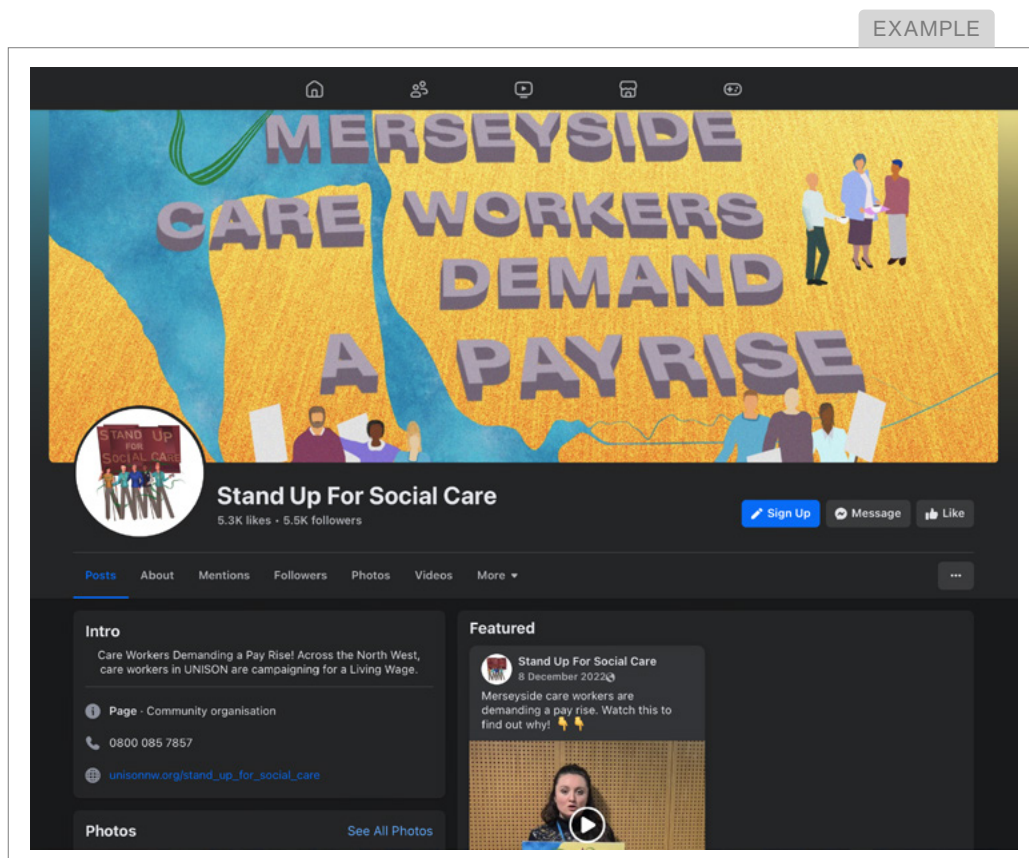
By sharing real stories, giving useful local information, and having clear calls to action (as laid out on pages 6–12), branches can create social media pages that can help you to grow your branch and achieve your goals.

Launching your page

Setting up a page is much like setting up a group. You'll need:

- A good profile picture (your branch logo or a recent action by a group of branch members that fits the dimensions of the profile pictures on the platform)
- A cover photo (usually a landscape image – a real picture or a campaign graphic tends to work better than a logo here)
- A name – your page should be the name of your branch but consider abbreviations if you have one that your members will recognise.
- A bio to tell people about the page e.g. This is the page of X UNISON, the union for workers at X employer / X region
- Website link and contact information – you could direct people to your branch website if you have one or the branch phone number. If you don't have one, you could direct people to the national website or UNISON Direct.

After that, it's all about inviting people to like the page directly on the platform(s) or sending a link out to your branch's members and contacts. Make sure you are posting regularly, monitoring that inbox and replying to comments on your posts!





**Direct messaging
– a powerful tool**

When online, direct messaging is as close as you can get to a real-life conversation. Your branch may have experience with UNISON’s peer-to-peer texting service Movement. Most branches considered Movement to have a positively transformative effect on their campaigns. Outside of Movement, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp are the two most widely used direct messaging tools by UNISON branches.



WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a great tool for communicating with members or activists. For many branches, committee WhatsApp groups are a central pillar of the organisation. This could be through branch committee WhatsApp Groups or direct messaging between activists.

WhatsApp can also be a great tool for reaching out to members during a campaign. Setting up groups for members involved in a campaign can help you to get short messages out quickly and efficiently. For an in-depth guide to WhatsApp – check out the TUC’s guide on the Comms & Digital section of the Organising Space ([organising.space.unison.org.uk](https://organising.space/unison.org.uk)).

Setting up campaign WhatsApp groups

There are two kinds of WhatsApp Groups: group chats and broadcast lists. The table below outlines their benefits.

FEATURE/ASPECT	WHATSAPP GROUP CHATS	WHATSAPP BROADCAST LISTS
Communication type	Two-Way Communication	One-Way Communication
Interaction	Members can send messages and interact with each other.	Only the sender can send messages; recipients cannot respond.
Visibility	All members can see the list of participants.	Recipients are not aware of who else is receiving the message.
Message history	New members can see the message history.	Recipients only see messages from the sender.
Notifications	All members receive notifications for every message.	Recipients receive notifications only for messages from the sender.
Purposes	Coordination Community Building	Announcements Targeted Messaging
Ideal for	Discussions Planning and strategy Gathering feedback	Sending official updates Distributing sensitive information Maintaining privacy among recipients



The branch website

The Purpose and Functions of a Branch Website

A branch website is a vital tool for communication and engagement. The main purpose of a branch website is to act as a central place for all key information. When UNISON members visit branch websites, it is generally to find something they're looking for, rather than news and updates (emails, printed materials and social media are better for that). A good branch website is one that helps members find what they need quickly and easily.

Websites also offer the benefits of being able to independently host forms for things like events or even petitions. It can also host documents for sharing, meaning you can upload key documents to a web page that people can visit whenever they need. This also comes in handy when employer firewalls don't allow attachments through the company email system.

What makes a good branch website?

1. **Ease of Navigation:** Most users visit a website for a specific purpose rather than to browse. It is crucial that the website is easy to navigate and that key information can be easily accessed from the home page.

Contact details of local reps, upcoming meeting dates and any courses for members and activists are some of the things that people might be looking for on a branch website.

You should also make sure it's easy for anyone visiting to join the union or update their details. A form for getting more involved that sends an email to someone in the branch is also a great idea.

Information should be well-organised and easily accessible. Use clear menus and categories to guide users.

2. **Evergreen Content:** Focus on content that remains relevant over time. Avoid posting too much news or temporary updates. This ensures the website remains current and useful without needing constant updates.
3. **Minimalistic Approach:** Avoid cluttering the website with too much content. A streamlined website with concise information is more user-friendly. Each page should have a clear purpose.
4. **Contact Information:** Ensure that contact details are easy to find. Members should be able to quickly access contact information for branch officers and relevant people.

Purchasing a purpose-built UNISON Website

UNISON websites are available to purchase on www.unison.site. These sites meet UNISON's branding and style guidelines, ensuring a professional look and creating brand consistency across the union. This consistency helps build trust and recognition among site visitors. As websites go, the UNISON sites are user-friendly and branch officers can update content relatively easily. Purchasing a website from UNISON means that your branch can ask other branches or your region to assist with any issues. Your branch can also purchase access to ongoing technical support from the website team.

For more detailed guidance and to get started with purchasing a UNISON website, visit the www.unison.site, where you can all relevant information.

UNISON National Join UNISON Get help Member benefits Regions My UNISON **+ More UNISON** Search this branch

UNISON
Branch Website Network

Get help now
Call us on 0800 0857 857
Contact us online

Home Overview Costs Support packages Menu

Designed specially for UNISON branches, building on the design of the main UNISON site

Create a great looking site quickly, easily and cheaply

Tell your members what you're doing – and how to contact you

A simple and easy to understand editing experience

Automatically publish your news stories on Facebook and Twitter

Not confident with the web? We have support packages

VISIT OUR DEMO SITE >



Accessibility

The importance of accessibility in union communications

UNISON is committed to inclusivity, it's vital that branches' communication materials are accessible to all members. Accessibility in communication ensures that every member has equal access to information, resources, and opportunities for participation.

Principles of accessible communication design

Creating accessible materials involves more than just compliance; it's about thoughtful and empathetic communication design:

Clarity and simplicity

- Use clear, straightforward language.
- Avoid jargon and complex sentences that might confuse or alienate members.
- Simple, direct communication is more likely to be universally understood.

Visual accessibility

- Ensure that visual materials are easy to read and understand.
- Use high-contrast colour schemes for text and backgrounds to assist those with visual impairments.
- Choose fonts that are easy to read and avoid cluttered layouts. Use style guide on page 64.
- Always provide alternative text descriptions for images and graphics.

Auditory and cognitive accessibility

- For audio and video content, include subtitles or transcripts to assist members who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Be mindful of overwhelm; information should be presented in manageable segments that don't overwhelm the reader or viewer.
- Consider using BSL signers, where budget allows, for online events with invited speakers.

Inclusive practices for printed materials

- For printed materials, consider options like Braille versions or large print editions.
- Always have an accessible digital version available, which can be more easily navigated by those using assistive technologies.

Engaging with members for feedback

Our efforts to enhance accessibility should be informed by the people they are intended to support:

- **Incorporating member input:** Regularly seek feedback from members with disabilities to understand their needs and preferences. This feedback is invaluable in creating materials that are truly accessible.
- **Continuous improvement:** Accessibility is an ongoing commitment. Regularly review and update communication materials based on member feedback and advancements in accessibility standards and technologies.

Conclusion

To uphold UNISON's values of equality and inclusivity, branches must prioritise accessibility in your communications. Accessible communication reflects our commitment to ensure that every member's voice is heard and valued. As your branch grows and evolves, it's important to remain dedicated to making every aspect of your communication as inclusive as possible.



UNISON
brand guidelines
& house style

UNISON Brand Guidelines

UNISON has published brand guidelines in order to help with brand consistency and readability. You can find the Brand Guidelines in full here (bit.ly/4bmCe9M), and a list of the basics is below.

Preferred Fonts

- Helvetica Now (Use Helvetica if not available)
- Sabon Next Pro
- Arial (Only if the other two are not available)

UNISON Colours

The UNISON colours are listed below as Hex Codes. You can type in Hex Codes in Canva or in Microsoft Office by clicking “More Colours”.

- UNISON Purple: #3C1D5D
- UNISON Green: #4C9C2E
- Black
- White

UNISON’s House Style – Guidelines for Writing

As well as the Brand Guidelines, UNISON has a House Style which is focused on writing rather than design. The House Style is particularly good for informing the use of inclusive language and helping to avoid jargon.

You can find the House Style here: bit.ly/3QOE6A8

Appendix 1

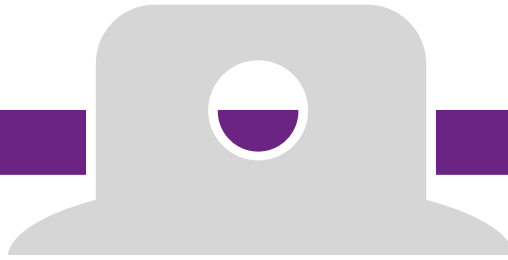
Sample Branch Communications Strategy

COMMUNICATION METHOD	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?	CURRENT PRACTICE	GOALS FOR THE NEXT YEAR
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branch Secretary • Branch Administrator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly email to all members. • Urgent emails when required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bespoke emails to different sections of membership. • All emails to focus on a single call-to-action. • Use the email flowchart every time we send a bulk email. • Improve email open rates by 5%.
Printed Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branch Secretary • Branch Communications Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaflets made on Word – very text heavy • Same leaflet for every area. • Leaflets emailed out to all activists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map noticeboards across key workplaces. • Create a network of contacts who will distribute materials.
Social Media Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branch Communications Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One large Facebook group • Unmoderated, full of spam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up new group for a distinct group of members. • Set group rules and remove spam. • Post content at least 1x a week.
Social Media Pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branch Communications Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old inactive Facebook Page and X account. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close pages and review next year.
Video Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review next year.

You can download a blank version of the table above on the organising space.

Appendix 2

Comms checklist



COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

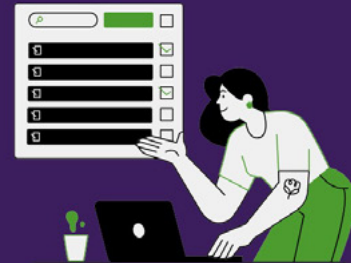
- There is a clear purpose for this communication
- It is tailored for the intended audience
- I have engaged the audience and grabbed their attention
- I have reduced the word count as much as I can and avoided jargon
- I have followed UNISON brand guidelines
- There is a single clear call-to-action that's easy to follow

Appendix 3

Email flowchart



Effective Emails: A Flow Chart



Organising to Win

WHY ARE YOU SENDING THIS?



- What is the purpose of sending the email? Are you sure the recipients will find it useful or interesting?
- Only have one action for the recipient to take. Have more? Send a second email another day.

IS IT GOING TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE?



- Is the email interesting to everyone who'll receive it, or just to a small portion of them?
- Could it be sent to a smaller, more targeted audience?

INTRODUCTION



- Do you address the issue in the subject line?
- Do you immediately provoke emotion? (Remember: Anger-Hope- Action)

WHY WOULD YOU OPEN THIS EMAIL?



- Does your subject line intrigue recipients?
- Is it as relevant as possible to the audience?

CONTENT



- Is it structured for easy reading using short paragraphs?
- Is the language clear, concise and free of jargon?

CALL-TO-ACTION



- Is there a compelling reason to take the action?
- Is the action clearly sign-posted and easy to perform?

PROOF READING



- Have you proofread the email? Check for grammar, punctuation and third-partying.
- Are all links and resources correctly included?

SIGNATURE



- Is the e-mail personable and relatable - from one member to another?
- Is it clear how to reply or get in touch?

ANALYSIS

Track the open-rates and conversions:



- What style of subject lines work?
- What times of day are best?
- Is there a group of workers that are more or less engaged than others? Why is this the case?

IMPLEMENT BEST-PRACTICE

- Use your analysis to find out what works best for each group of workers.
- Use this to form a bespoke email strategy to best engage members across your branch.



Appendix 4

Useful Links

Bit.ly

<https://bit.ly>

Used for creating short links and QR codes. Other similar services are available.

Canva

https://www.canva.com/en_gb

One of the most accessible tools for graphic design for online or offline use. Other tools are available but UNISON branches using Canva have reported it as one of the most professional-looking and simple-to-use platforms.

Organising to Win Guides

<https://www.unison.org.uk/organising-to-win-guides-2024>

Many of the techniques and methods referred to in this document are explained further in these guides that are essential reading for all UNISON activists.

Organising Space

<https://organisingspace.unison.org.uk>

All resources referred to in this document are hosted in the Comms & Digital section on the Organising Space. The UNISON Organising Space is accessible to all registered UNISON activists and features a wide range of helpful documents for all areas of UNISON activity.

TUC Digital Lab

<https://digital.tuc.org.uk>

TUC Digital Lab is a great resource for staying up-to-date on the latest digital technologies and methods for trade unionists. Some of the information on there might be a bit too technical but it's worth monitoring to inspire creativity and innovation in your organising.

Alchemer

<https://www.alchemer.com>

An online survey platform that allows you to build, share and analyse highly customisable surveys and petitions.

Microsoft Forms

<https://forms.office.com/>

An online survey platform, simpler than Alchemer, that allows you to build, share and analyse basic surveys and petitions.

Glossary

Accessibility

Ensuring that communication materials are usable and understandable by all members, including those with disabilities, by following specific design principles and practices.

Action

A step that members are encouraged to take as part of a campaign or communication, such as signing a petition, voting, or attending a meeting.

Anger-Hope-Action

A communication strategy used in union organising that begins by agitating around an issue (Anger), offering a solution (Hope), and then calling for participation (Action).

Branch Communications Strategy

A plan developed by a UNISON branch to outline the methods, platforms, and goals for communicating with members over a specific period.

Broadcast List (WhatsApp)

A one-way communication tool in WhatsApp that allows a sender to send messages to multiple recipients without them being able to see each other's responses.

Call-to-Action

A prompt in communication materials that encourages the reader to take immediate action, such as clicking a link, signing up, or getting involved in a campaign.

Campaign

An organised series of actions or communications intended to achieve a specific goal, such as improving working conditions or increasing union membership.

Canva

An online design tool used by UNISON branches to create professional-looking posters, flyers, and other visual communications with ease.

Checklist

A tool provided in the document to ensure all communication materials meet certain criteria before being released.

Design Principles

Guidelines for creating visually appealing and effective communication materials, including simplicity, hierarchy, alignment, and accessibility.

Direct Messaging

A method of communication that allows for private conversations between individuals or small groups, often used in organising and campaigning.

Email Flowchart

A visual guide included in the document to help branches create effective and purposeful email communications.

Engagement

The level of interaction and involvement that members have with the union's communications, often measured through actions taken in response to those communications.

Feedback

Input from members about the effectiveness of communications, used to improve future communications and strategies.

Groups (Social Media)

A private online space where UNISON members can communicate and collaborate, often focused on specific workplaces or issues.

Graphics

Visual elements such as images, charts, or illustrations used in communication materials to enhance their impact and accessibility.

House Style

UNISON's guidelines for writing that promote the use of inclusive language and the avoidance of jargon in communications.

Inclusive Practices

Approaches in communication that ensure all members, regardless of their abilities or background, can access and understand the materials.

Mapping (Workplaces)

The process of identifying key locations within workplaces where union communications can be most effectively distributed or where engagement is most needed.

Member-Centred Communications

An approach that prioritises the voices and experiences of members in all communications, using personal testimonies and relatable stories.

Noticeboard

A physical or digital board used for posting union information and updates in workplaces, often monitored by activists to keep content current and relevant.

Pages (Social Media)

An external-facing social media account that broadcasts messages in the name of your branch. These messages can be viewed by everyone and are read as the official voice of the branch.

Petition

A tool used in campaigns to gather support and apply pressure on decision-makers, often used in conjunction with data collection for follow-up actions.

Printed Communications

Physical materials such as leaflets, posters, and newsletters distributed to members, often used in conjunction with digital communications for maximum reach.

QR Code

A scannable code used in printed materials that directs members to online resources, making it easier to access additional information or take action.

Segmentation (Audience)

The practice of dividing the membership into different groups based on factors like job role or digital literacy, allowing for more targeted and relevant communications.

Short Link

A simplified version of a web address, created using tools like Bit.ly, that is easier for members to type into their devices and often used in printed communications.

Social Media

Online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram used by UNISON branches to communicate with members, share updates, and encourage participation.

Survey

A method of gathering information from members about their views on issues, often used to guide branch activities or campaigns.

Testimony

A personal account or story shared by a member, used in communications to illustrate the real-life impact of union work and to connect with other members emotionally.

Third Partying

A term used to describe language or actions that unintentionally create a separation between the union and its members, making the union seem like an external entity rather than a collective of workers.

WhatsApp

A messaging app used by UNISON branches for quick and efficient communication with members and activists, often used in campaigns and committee communications.