Future of Work

for Unions Collection

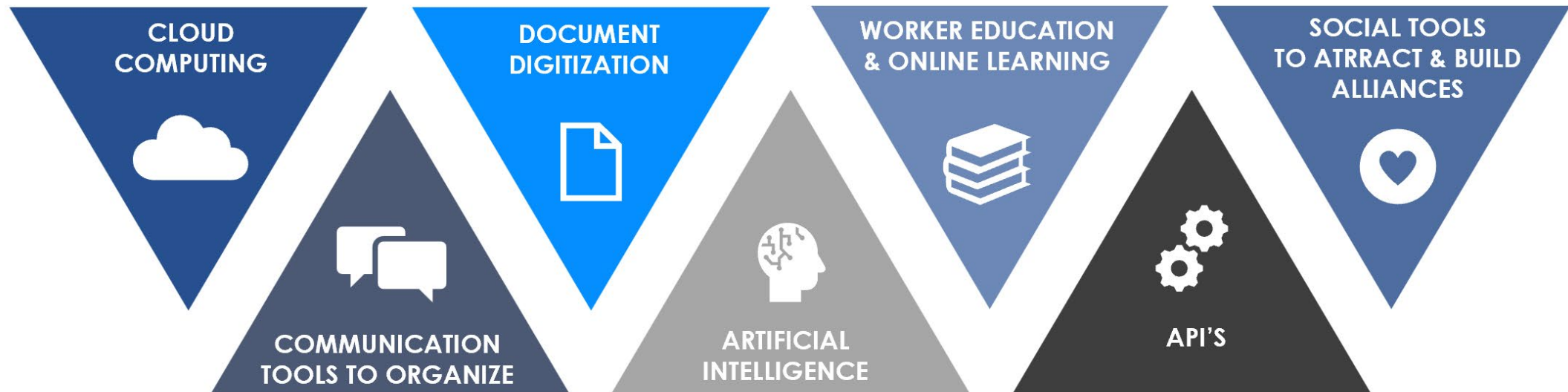## 2022

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Introduction

Technology advancement has changed how people work and live. The reliance on technology in our daily lives are undeniable – from communication, relationship building, to day-to-day tasks. Many unions feel pressured to evolve based on changing member expectations and an increased need to be more nimble and responsive. How can unions effectively leverage technology to ensure staff are effective in their work environments and meet the needs of their members?

There are seven key technology trends that union can leverage to improve member and staff experience. To hear more about these trends, check out our webinar on [Adopting Technology to Transform Your Union](#).

CLOUD COMPUTING

COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO ORGANIZE

DOCUMENT DIGITIZATION

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

WORKER EDUCATION & ONLINE LEARNING

API'S

SOCIAL TOOLS TO ATRRACT & BUILD ALLIANCES

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In this **Future of Work Collection**, we go in-depth in four areas where unions can immediately leverage technology to transform your union:

❖ Automation
❖ Cloud Computing
❖ Application Integration
❖ Digital Engagement

" In today's day in age when you can open your cell phone and get your electricity bill or text someone in another country … but an organizer doesn't have information on whether a member is current on their dues or has a grievance, just doesn't help build confidence. A union that isn't able to capture that information and project that level of confidence just doesn't stand a chance. "

Gwen Mills
Secretary Treasurer
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Article **1**

Benefits & Challenges
for Introducing
Automation at Unions

The Benefits and Challenges of Introducing Automation at Unions

In several industries, the pandemic changed how people are working and increased the reliance on technology for communication, relationship building, and day-to-day tasks. Many unions feel pressured to evolve based on changing member expectations and an increased need for remote collaboration. How can unions effectively leverage technology to ensure staff are effective in their work environments and meet the needs of their members?

One area of opportunity is in automating repetitive, labor-intensive tasks, using computerized programs. What are the benefits? What are the challenges? How can we embrace change and still have comfort and consistency in the union activities for its members and staff?

There are several benefits of automation that when thoughtfully applied can add tremendous value to strengthen the union administratively as well enable organizing or engagement activities.

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Process Large Data Set
with Speed and Accuracy

The ability to process a large data set with speed and accuracy is one of the key benefits of automation. Not only can this type of automation minimize errors and speed up processing time, but it can also increase timeliness and confidence in union data.

For example, with increased data accuracy, unions can have a more accurate snapshot of its membership and be confident utilizing its membership data as a basis for organizing initiatives.

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Business Insights to
Support Decision Making

A second benefit of using computerized programs for data processing is the ability to visualize the dataset in a timely manner. Oftentimes, modern computer programs have analytic dashboards built in so that unions can pinpoint and proactively address issues before they become bigger problems.

For example, unions can use this knowledge to keep employers accountable for checkoff submissions, bargaining unit list submissions and other administrative responsibilities.

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Streamline Repetitive Tasks

Finally, unions can streamline repetitive tasks through the use of intelligent forms that simplify data entry efforts (e.g. auto complete) and improve accuracy (e.g. address validation against the US Postal address database). More advanced intelligent forms in the union space can also automatically create member records from checkoff submissions or bargaining unit lists.

Such automation can free up time against administrative tasks. In turn, staff will have more time to focus on key areas such as direct member engagement and support, organizing enablement or special projects. A study published by Smart Sheet found that 78% of employees agreed that automation allows them to spend more time on the interesting and rewarding aspects of their job.

78%

percentage of employees who agreed that automation allows them to spend more time on the interesting and rewarding aspects of their job

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Challenge

While there are great benefits, successful implementation of automation at unions can also be challenging. One of the key challenges surrounds the fear of the unknowns. Here are some considerations to address the reluctance to automate:

❖ Turning unknowns into knowns by investigating and understanding what automation could bring to the union can quickly break down concerns.

❖ Automation is not about changing for the sake of change, but evolution and improvement. Change can be difficult, but once people see the results and embrace the 'new normal' it can be a rising tide that can float many boats.

❖ The people side of adapting to any change is of key importance. Improvement of this nature is not something you introduce and 'see how it goes'. Careful planning of how changes are introduced and engagement of staff in the process is critical to success.

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Looking Ahead

As illustrated above, automation can improve productivity, enable staff to work on higher value activities, improve staff engagement and most importantly, further create value for members.

While the upfront investigation and focus on change management required can be considerable, a study by McKenzie & Company found that the benefits typically are between 3x and 10x the organizational investment. As technology continues to mature and gain sophistication, the potential reward continues to multiply as well.

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Cloud Computing

and Remote Collaboration at Unions

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Cloud Computing
and Remote Collaboration

Cloud computing allows teams to work together in real-time without geographical limitations. It provides an accessible, affordable, and scalable platform that can be leveraged by a variety of toolsets for staff to interact, communicate and collaborate with one another. While cloud computing is not new, the global pandemic underscored the value and flexibility of cloud computing and accelerated adoption. Organizations that were cloud-first were able to transition to remote work swiftly and with less disruption to organizational productivity. Just a few months into the pandemic, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said that the company had seen two years of digital transformation in two months as its customers started adopting cloud solutions.

With accelerated adoption of cloud-based operations, union members and staff will increasingly come to expect the same level of accessibility and flexibility within their unions as they do with companies they interact with in other aspects of their daily lives. Unions that do not meet modernization expectations risk losing member and staff confidence.

What is Cloud Computing?

Cloud computing is the on-demand availability of computer system resources over the Internet ("the cloud") without direct active management by the user. Organizations pay for computer system resources (e.g., data storage, computing power) utilized with the pay-as-you-go model commonly attached to cloud computing services. Cloud computing also allows organizations to scale up and down seamlessly given the infrastructure and flexibility offered by cloud providers. Some of the popular cloud providers include Microsoft AZURE, Amazon Web Services (AWS), Google Cloud Platform, to name a few.

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Here are the key benefits of adopting cloud computing for unions:

User Access & Flexibility

Cloud-based applications provide access anytime, anywhere through web browsers or mobile devices. This enables staff to access necessary applications and files wherever they are - at a remote work location or while they are on the road. For example, union organizers spend most of their job on the road. By being able to access member data on-the-go is a strong enabler to their interactions with members. Additionally, when organizers can update member data on-the-go, it ensures member data is kept up-to-date and centrally stored in a streamlined manner.

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Improved Team Collaboration

Improved team collaboration is another strong benefit of cloud computing. Continuing with the example above, when organizers spread across geography can update and access member data centrally stored and in a timely manner, organizers and their manager have up-to-date visibility of the aggregated state of members, member details and organizing efforts. Therefore, cloud-base applications enable organizers to better collaborate with one another.

Similarly, when documents are stored centrally in the cloud, they become easier to access. Staff no longer need to constantly email their team members just for an updated version of a file. Moreover, when team members have access to the correct file versions, it makes discussions smoother, ensures everyone is on the same page (quite literally), and remarkably improves team collaboration.

Sharing all the project details and files with the entire team also leads to improved employee engagement since all team members have an equal opportunity to offer their input.

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Professionally Managed

Cloud providers are experts in hosting cloud applications and offer leading policies, technologies and controls. Their practices strengthen security and help protect client data, applications and infrastructure from potential threats. Cloud providers commonly offer high availability solutions and ensure data is backed up to prevent data loss or provide flexible restore points.

Moreover, cloud computing is broadly recognized for taking away the huge overhead of building, maintaining and upgrading one's own physical infrastructure. This, in turn, allows organizations to better focus resources on adding value to members and organizing.

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Challenges

Despite the benefits, there are some challenges unions should also be aware of when it comes to cloud-base operations:

Compliance and Security

We sometimes hear of security breaches in the news. This naturally makes some stakeholders uncomfortable with the idea of surrendering important applications and sensitive member and financial data onto the cloud.

In its journey, unions need to plan out the approaches to address compliance and security. This should be a collaborative effort across the union IT department, cloud provider and business stakeholders. To help put our minds at ease, it is worth highlighting that according to the [Flexera 2022 State of the Cloud Report](), more than half of survey respondents said they'll consider moving at least some of their sensitive consumer data or corporate financial data to the cloud, which reflects increasing confidence in the security tools and processes of cloud providers to implement adequate protection.

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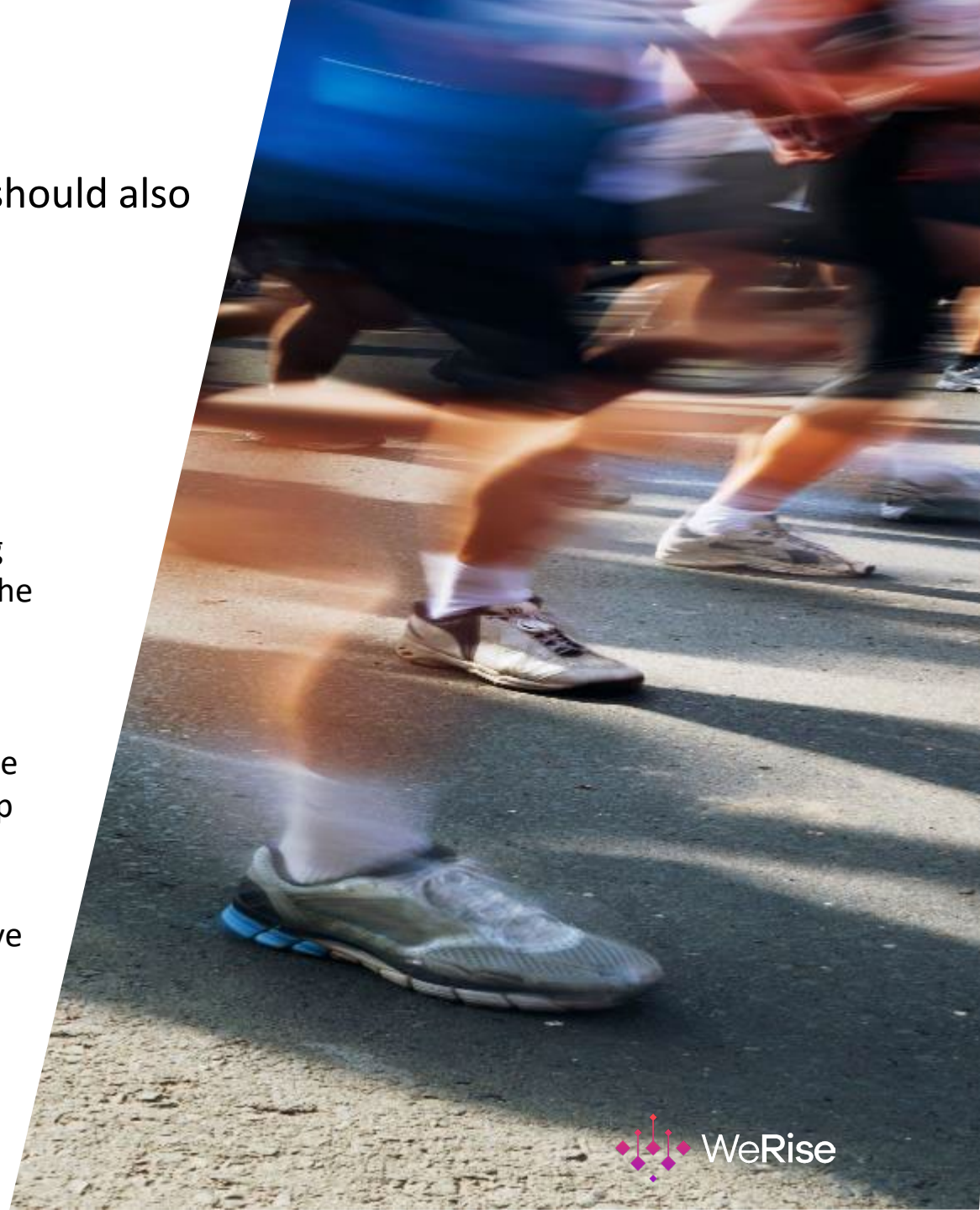
Not a One Size Fits All Scenario

While cloud computing has great benefits, it may not be the best choice for all applications and data sets within a union. Unions need to consider a few factors such as the business value of migrating to the cloud, cost of on-premise vs. cloud hosting, security risks, to name a few. Commonly where there is a high value in making an application accessible anytime/anywhere and in enabling collaboration, a cloud-based model is more likely to be the superior choice.

Finding Skilled Talent

Finally, the skillsets and mindset for managing cloud-based operations are different from an on-premise one. It requires IT departments to be more agile and operate within proactive models. As an example, unions need to proactively define the governance and controls that make sense for the business vs. fully rely on cloud providers' broad stroke policies and practices.

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Looking Ahead

In summary, cloud computing enables staff to interact, communicate and collaborate seamlessly. For managers, it also provides real-time visibility on the state of operations and the ability to make data-driven decisions in a timely manner.

With accelerated adoption during COVID, the speed, flexibility, and ability to support remote collaboration, cloud computing is the 'new normal' for people accessing technologies in their day to day lives. Unions can leverage these technologies to improve their operations and meet the ever-evolving expectations of their members.

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Application Integration
Provides Seamless Integration at Unions

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Application Integration Provides Seamless Experiences at Unions

Software applications are critical for modern unions – from dues management, member engagement through to business intelligence to support decision making and more. When introducing technologies, it is common for organizations to acquire point solutions to solve specific business problems (e.g., communication broadcasting platform, accounting system, membership management system). While point solutions tend to cost less and easier to implement, unions approaching software applications this way tend to result in a fragmented technology ecosystem, resulting in issues such as multiple and inconsistent copies of members records, duplication of processes, and a lack of standardization.

To fully take advantage of technology, modern unions should consider an integrative technology ecosystem where data across different software programs are able to interface and flow from one program to another. When done correctly, it is really what allows modern unions to realize the full benefit of their software investment and use data to its full potential.

As your union moves towards an integrative technology ecosystem, here are the benefits and challenges for your consideration:

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Single Source of Truth and Information Sharing

Creating an integrative technology ecosystem (or sometimes referred to as enterprise application integration) enables the flow of information between separate software programs within a union or local, as well as from external sources seamlessly. For example, locals update member records internally through different activities such as dues management and organizing. Locals also regularly receive worker data from a myriad of external sources, such as employers or benefit providers, all with different data formats.

Application integration can consolidate such data collection efforts, eliminating the redundancies of having each application collect and store data for its own purposes. Integration can also create a single source of truth and a single point of access to data for the people who need it. That means staff spends less time searching for information – and the data they get is often more complete and up to date. Integration also enables more effective collaboration between individuals and departments as operations are no longer siloed in separate applications and departments.

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Process Automation

Application integration can also streamline processes that include data or activity from multiple software applications. For example, data from a membership management system can be integrated with a member engagement platform to deliver targeted messages to members based on their prior behaviour or demographics. That effort could then be coupled with an analytics package to measure the success of the engagement campaign.

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Business Intelligence to Better Inform Decision Making

One of the highest business benefits of application integration is that it allows unions to recognize and respond to opportunities more quickly. Application integration can help unions address shifts in its membership, identify administrative bottlenecks and more – all from a single interface.

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Challenges

While the promise of seamless application integration offers several benefits to improve productivity, increase connectivity, and more, there are some challenges unions should be aware of as well:

Complexity

While connecting a union's applications and streamlining business processes do sound appealing, it can be quite complex. Stakeholders across the organization need to be aligned with what the end goals of an application integration plan consist of before proceeding. With planning, unions can identify priority areas to invest in and deprioritize or even forgo areas where low value will be achieved with integration.

Control (Or Lack Thereof)

Integration developers have a limited range of control over the many different business applications. Legacy applications and packed applications may not be easily changed or connect with an integration solution.

Standards

The challenge with integration is that most messaging systems and applications use different data formats. Within an enterprise integration platform, for example, existing XML Web Services are only responsible for a small portion of integration challenges. Standardizing all data exchange to XML may not always be feasible. So, ensuring that all pieces of your integration environment are supported requires advanced data transformation capabilities.

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Looking Ahead

In summary, a seamlessly integrated technology ecosystem allows an organization to have a single source of truth when it comes to critical business data (e.g., membership records). It also encourages information sharing across the organization, streamlines business processes, and enables staff to make data-driven decisions with holistic and reliable data. In other words, an integrated technology ecosystem is a critical foundation that enables staff to be productive and provides them the ability to identify and act on issues or opportunities in a timely manner.

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Article 4
Digital Engagement
for Organizing at Unions

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Digital Engagement
for Organizing at Unions

An increased usage of digital tools by society and union members means heightened importance of leveraging digital communication tools to engage and organize members. The good news is digital communication tools have matured and with software-as-a-service models (SaaS) becoming more popular, unions can utilize cloud-based tools at a cost-effective monthly subscription price, access it anytime anywhere, and remove the overhead and headaches of managing servers and software upgrades within the organization.

As your union consider ramping up engagement and member organizing, here are the benefits and challenges for your consideration.

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Timely and Frequent Communication
Builds Engagement

The first benefit is that unions can communicate to its member in a frequent and timely manner through digital communication tools, as the incremental cost for digital communication, such as emails and text messages, are very low. Through timely and more frequent communication, unions can keep members in the loop, build engagement, and cultivate advocates.

For example, in the beginning of a campaign, unions can communicate the cause and the plan around a campaign to gain buy in and demonstrate how the union is fighting for its members. Then there can be subsequent communication about how members can participate to ensure success (e.g., participating in an event, tell your story). Based on event registration, the union can also send follow up reminders and communicate what to expect closer to the time of an event to ensure success.

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Tailored Communication Improves Effectiveness

Another powerful attribute of digital communication tools is the ability to segment and personalize messaging. Depending on the location, job type, relationships, or even campaign engagement level of a member, union organizers can tailor the messaging to maximize relevance and get the optimal response from each member.

One of the common communication mistakes is sending too many irrelevant messages. According to Forbes, an average consumer sees 4,000 – 10,000 ads each day and that number is growing every year. In this environment, relevance is key. Organizations that bombard their audience risk being tuned out. So, while improving frequency and timeliness of communication is desirable, it should be coupled with relevant messaging based on each member's geographic, demographic, and psychographics.

Average consumer sees

4,000 – 10,000

ads each day

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Through modern digital communication tools, segmentation can be done by filtering different fields from the membership database and saving different segments for future use. Furthermore, unions can create automated workflows and send out different communication based on how a member response. For example, if a member opened an email and registered to an event, the automated workflow could automatically send out an event registration confirmation message and send out a reminder a couple of days prior to the event. All of this can be present and without additional intervention from the organizer. As an alternate scenario, if a member did not open an email, the automated workflow can repeat the initial message a few days later.

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Member Engagement Insights

Finally, digital communication tools can provide union organizers with timely insights on how different campaigns and messaging are performing and how different members are engaging with the union. With analytics dashboards, organizers can view the overall performance of a campaign based on a point in time and drill down to specific areas (e.g., by geography, by employer, by role, by messaging, by individual member) to inform decision making.

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In the short term, such insights can help organizers identify opportunities, pivot organizing activities and focus on areas that require more efforts. In the long term, it can help the union build organizing best practices, identify influencers, and design more effective campaigns in the future.
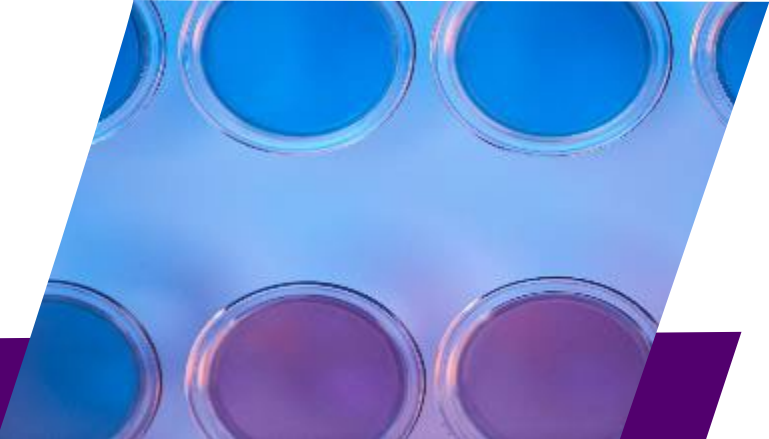
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Challenges

While digital communication tools can enable unions in ways that traditional communication methods cannot, they come with challenges that unions need to be aware of as well. These challenges include:

The lack of context: One key benefit of face-to-face communication is the rich context that accompanies the messaging – the surrounding, the body language of the communicator, and the response of participants around you. Through digital communications – whether it is an email or text message broadcasted out or a members-only website, the member on the receiving end could be in a variety of context (e.g., just heard some great family news or in contrast just had a bad experience with an angry customer) which can affect how the member interprets a message. With face-to-face communication, the communicator can see the response of the recipients immediately and clarify on the spot. With broadcast-based messaging, the communicator wouldn't know until there are responses from recipients.

Speed of dissemination: A feature of communicating through digital communication tools is speed of disseminating messages. While instant dissemination is great and convenient, such attribute of digital communication can sometimes be a double-edged sword. Should a message be interpreted improperly and get shared out to various platforms widely and in a negative light, such as over social media, this can require damage control from unions.

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Be mindful of the digital divide: While digital adoption is very high in North America, with 93% of U.S. adults (source: Pew Research, 2020) and 92% of Canadian adults (source: Statistics Canada, 2020) use the internet, not everyone has access to the internet or uses digital communication tools. With that in mind, traditional communication methods need to be available for those that prefer traditional methods of communication.

Despite the challenges, it is important to remember that the rewards of digital communication methods outweigh the risks, and unions should build up strong digital communication competencies to effectively engage its membership.

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Looking Ahead

In summary, digital communication tools are part of society's fabric today. It enables unions to achieve greater member engagement through more timely, frequent communication and with greater relevancy. Moreover, digital communication tools provide valuable insights for organizers on various campaigns, messaging, and how members respond to them in real-time. Such insights help unions better understand their members and build more effective organizing campaigns in the future.
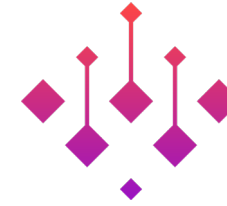
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About Bursting Silver

Bursting Silver is a technology products and services company that specializes in helping unions with their technology and business needs. We are the creator of WeRise and also offer a wide variety of services specially targeted to help unions – including IT strategy, business
process improvement, software implementation, and systems integration.

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werise-unions.com

WeRise is a software platform that enables unions to efficiently administer all aspects of their memberships and provides a platform for organizers to rally union members.

WeRise is 100% cloud-based with security, accessibility, and scalability built-in to future proof your operations. The solution has been architected to provide a cohesive software solution across all locals, while keeping local data segregated and secure.

With a powerful platform as a foundation, WeRise is multifaceted with the member information at its core. Clients can use the out-of-the-box capabilities as they are released and participate in product development plans through feedback or take a more direct role in specific engagements to expand the system to meet organizational goals.

Some key features include:

❖ Membership Data Management
❖ Dues Management
❖ Dashboard & Data Visualization
❖ Member List Segmentation
❖ Email/SMS Blast to Members