

Communication Strategies for Locals

The union is a movement, not a club.



Maintaining strong connections with members and keeping them engaged in ongoing discussions and events is vital to having an informed and active membership. Though social media communication is inexpensive and can reach large numbers of people, it can't impart specific information or definitively move people to significant action.

People receive numerous messages through web content, emails, newsletters, and social media. The important thing is to ensure that your messages are visible and delivered through various platforms.

Website:

Building a website is not like building a house. Websites need regular updating and maintenance. A website designed in 2019 feels really dated today—just five years later.

The **AFM Quartet website** program, through GoPro Hosting, is extremely valuable and viable for locals that want a mobile device-responsive website that is affordable and easy to update.

Key menu tabs/sections to include: About | News | For Members | Join | Contact

- The content should be member-oriented, but it should also assist with recruiting new members and providing information about the local to non-members.
- **About:** Identify the mission and leadership. This section can also include the history of the local.
- A **News** section where people can easily find out what's happening as well as find information about upcoming dates.
- **For Members:** Having a repository for member documents, such as newsletters, scale sheets, contracts, etc., is always extremely valuable. (That functionality is built into AFM Quartet with a login that members already have via afm.org.)
- Have a dedicated **Join** page. Make it easy for new members to join online—If a prospective member has made the effort to find your website, they're on the hook, and you need to reel them in.
- **Contact** info. Make it easy for visitors to your website to find out where you're located and how to contact someone for more information.

MYTH: "If you build it, they will come." Not true. Getting your information out to the public takes effort. Just because it's posted online doesn't mean that people will be beating a path to your door.

- The **Google Business Profile** is a free tool that allows you to control how your business appears on Google Search and Maps. With a Business Profile, people can easily find your website, phone number, address, and hours.

Meetings:

- If your local's meeting schedule isn't already established in the bylaws, it's important to pick a standard day and time for your meeting for consistency—like the second Tuesday or Wednesday of the month. Picking the second week avoids having the meeting fall on the 1st of the month (that tends to sneak up too quickly for some of us).
- Send out meeting reminder announcements about your upcoming meeting by email and social media. Create the email reminder as an event that can be added to a calendar with a click to accept.

- Zoom meetings are very effective in enabling many people to attend without travel time or having to leave the house, but also try to schedule periodic special live, in-person meetings if possible.
- Use your local's working committees to develop meeting topics and grow attendance. Your executive board should create committees with rank-and-file members to address each issue. Charge the committees with reporting back to the membership at a regular meeting. Those reports can form the basis of that meeting's discussion, along with the local's regular business.
- Have a topic for discussion or a guest speaker for the meeting—consider having another union in your area come talk with members about their work, successes, or how our members can support their efforts. This helps build coalitions and partnerships with other labor unions.

Newsletter:

- Print newsletters are great, but you can get more bang out of an email newsletter. Simpler design and setup. Quicker delivery. And, of course, zero printing and postage costs.
- That said, there is greater value in a printed newsletter. It has a much longer reader shelf life than anything else. Social media pages are basically drive-by contact; email is scan-and-delete (sometimes just deleted), whereas real mail can be scanned, set aside, scanned again, etc., until the recipient throws it away. It will usually get scanned one more time before going into the recycling bin.
- It is important to ensure that you have email addresses for all members. Emails help you move members to action for specific events/topics and share monthly/quarterly newsletters.
- Develop a schedule of regular topics to help you fill issues regularly. Using an outline will help build out content quickly. Try to develop consistency in your messaging. If you tell a story about the MPTF Labor Day event, you can also write up a story about other MPTF events.
- Ask for contributors and writing help--create a communications/newsletter committee to share the work.
- Consider having a feature story on local members/groups. These highlights might appear first in the newsletter and then be shared on social media for recognition by the wider community.
- And vice-versa, you can repurpose some social media content to reach members who are not active on social media.
- Your newsletter is a journal/record of events, but it's important to not only journal what has happened in the last couple of months but also have forward-thinking content.

Social Media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Threads, Tiktok, LinkedIn

Social media is a free, instant, and easily measurable communication tool, but it may not be the most effective way to reach your members. Updates on a Facebook page are typically only seen by 8-14% of the page's fans, which is lower than the average open rate of around 25% for emails and even higher engagement for physical mail (newsletters).

However, social media can be particularly useful for organizing activities, inspiring members to take immediate action, and reaching out to non-members.

Social media management can be time-consuming. You might want to appoint a couple of people to be on your social media team. People involved in social media management need to be interested and active on social media already. Perhaps you want to recruit one of your younger members to join the social media team. (It's a great way to identify invested members.)

- Use posts to build your locals' reputation and identity in the community and communicate to members. Social media is a very soft influencer that contributes to and builds upon a person's engagement with their union.

- Your social media does not have to be all about your union. It’s not a digital brochure. Use social media to recognize members and their activities and achievements – can be both musical and personal/community events.
- Share labor triumphs to inspire members – at a local level, activities of other AFM locals, as well as national labor efforts.
- Post a **Social Media Policy** to prevent trolling (and ban users when necessary).

Sample Social Media Policy: We respectfully ask everyone to honor the following guidelines when commenting on this page.

- Comments should be relevant to the post.
- No foul, discriminatory, defamatory, libelous, or threatening language.
- No invasion of privacy; no racially, ethnically, or otherwise objectionable language.
- Do not post material in violation of trademark or copyright laws or other laws.
- No attacks identifying individuals, companies, unions, or other organizations.
- No spam, flaming, flooding, advertisements, or solicitations.

Because it is impossible to list all types of disrespectful or inappropriate commentary, we also reserve the right to remove any other comments we consider inappropriate and to block or remove any individual who repeatedly posts inappropriate comments. We do this not to stifle dissent but to promote an exchange of ideas instead of confrontational attacks. Repeated failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in being blocked from posting on the AFM Facebook Page.

Privacy info: The AFM sponsors this social media site to discuss and advocate for the important issues facing members and musicians today. Comments posted by other readers do not necessarily represent the views of the AFM, nor do links provided on this site constitute an endorsement by AFM.

- It’s difficult to be on all platforms but try to engage with Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Instagram is growing and still vital to reaching a younger demographic, but you need an engaging image for each post. (Canva is a free software that is very easy to use.)
- Consistent posting is important. It doesn’t necessarily have to be daily, but aim for 2 or 3 times per week for best results.
- It’s important that you, your board, and your officers, like and share your own social media messaging to build the page’s traffic (and increase algorithm response). Also, important when scrolling through social media, it’s good to both “like” and “share” messaging. Social media networks are a spider's web of content that becomes more visible as traffic increases.

To Wrap It Up:

Maintaining strong connections with members is crucial, but reaching out to other musicians and finding new members is also important. Social media should be part of the mix—along with emails, direct mail, phone calls, and personal contact—to keep members connected and involved with the local. Remember to cross-promote all your activities through the various communications channels.

Communication strategies and social media channels continue to evolve and change. Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or would like to share ideas.

Antoinette Follett E: afollett@afm.org | C: 315.383.1028
AFM Director of Communications/PR and International Musician Managing Editor