

A photograph of a diverse group of young adults in a bright, modern indoor setting. In the foreground, a young woman with dark curly hair and a green t-shirt is smiling broadly and clapping her hands. To her left, another young woman with long dark hair is also smiling. In the background, other people are visible, some clapping, creating a sense of a positive group event or celebration. The image is framed by a thick orange border.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUNG MEMBERS

**A QUICK SUMMARY AND HOW-TO GUIDE
FOR COMMUNICATORS**





INTRO

**IN 2017, NUPGE COMMISSIONED
A SERIES OF STUDIES FOCUSED
ON UNDERSTANDING, ENGAGING
AND COMMUNICATING WITH UNION
MEMBERS AGED 18-35.**

The following guide is the result of several rounds of research ranging from surveying millennials in the general Canadian population and other Canadian unions, surveying Component members, and one-on-one interviews with almost a hundred millennial members from all Components and regions across Canada.

COMMUNICATING WITH MILLENNIALS

**TONE IS TURNING OFF MANY
MILLENNIAL MEMBERS FROM
UNION NEWS, INFORMATION,
REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT AND
OTHER COMMUNICATIONS.**

- Half of members are satisfied with current union tone.
- About a third of millennials feel that their union's communications tone is leaving them feeling detached.
- Millennials are the most educated generation in history and "plugged-in" to the many sources of information at their disposal.
- Many prefer a more nuanced and sophisticated view of the relationship between the labour movement and their employers.
- Many millennial members want less condemnation of their employer.
- More explanations of all sides of an issue so that they can make up their own minds.
- Refined communications are especially necessary as young members are more cynical of:
 - **Hyperbole**
 - **Dramatic wording**
 - **"Us versus them" framing**
- Be careful of "permanent-crises" tones in communications which exhaust some members instead of inspiring them.
- Anti-rhetoric does not mean anti-union.



MILLENNIALS SHARE VALUES SIMILAR TO THE LABOUR MOVEMENT:

KEY MILLENNIAL SOCIETAL ISSUES:

- Protecting the most vulnerable.
- Universal access to education and information.
- Affordable housing.
- Net neutrality (vs. corporate control of the internet).

TOP 3 MILLENNIAL WORKPLACE ISSUES:

- Ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.
- Ensuring a lack of discrimination based on race, sex, creed, etc.
- Ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women.

**Q: ARE YOU USUALLY INTERESTED
IN NEWS OR INFORMATION
RELATED TO YOUR UNION?**



**68%
YES I'M INTERESTED
MOST OF THE TIME.**

Millennial members want to hear more about other millennials and millennial issues from their union.

- Don't worry that no one is listening: over two-thirds of millennial members really want to hear from their union.
- The other third aren't shutting their ears to union communications, but:
 - **Many feel like unions are fighting old battles and trying to hang on to benefits for older members while ignoring the new members.**
 - **Many of these millennials feel that all the information they receive is focused on topics only related to older members; retirement, pension, vacation time, etc.**
 - **They feel there is no voice speaking to union youth and want to know what their union is doing for young workers.**
- Millennials do care about ideas like equality, but many are insecure in their job and stressed out.
- They're trying to survive and it's hard to spare attention on wider societal issues when they feel overwhelmed with struggling through day-to-day responsibilities.
- Millennials don't want to be "lectured" about these issues by the older generations.
- Older union members communicating about these topics risk looking both ironic and tone-deaf.
- Millennials who are in the same situations themselves are most effective at speaking on these issues.

Millennial members need to be educated in labour movement history.

- Many millennial members lack an understanding of the labour movement's history within a wider societal context; they are unknowledgeable about union positions on issues not directly related to workers' rights and protections.
- Many millennials are interested in societal issues but are currently confused by their union's participation in these discussions.
- Educating younger members on how unions fit into societal gains historically will help:
 - **Communications about how and why societal issues are being approached by unions in the present.**
 - **How a union's efforts will benefit humanity and union members alike.**
- Unions need to be careful of their tone when communicating all the above.

Just over half of millennial members feel their union is “out of touch”.

- Many millennial members believe an “in-touch” union is:
 - **On the forefront of communications and service technology.**
 - **Reaches out to its members constantly.**
 - **Communicates with its members transparently.**
 - **Constantly requests feedback.**
- Be proactive with your communications and digital strategies!

Addressing members as Brother & Sister is considered too dated.

- Millennials like that the terms Brother and Sister represented a sense of unity and family, but feel the terms themselves are dated.
- Try using verbiage that highlights this inclusiveness but is more modern.

**DON'T BE
OUT OF
TOUCH
WITH YOUR
MEMBERS.**

**REACH OUT.
EDUCATE.**

**41% OF MILLENNIALS
FOLLOW THE COMPANY THEY
WORK FOR ON SOCIAL MEDIA.**





Email is now. Social media is the future.

- Social media is already a more important source of info to millennial members than:
 - **Their union rep.**
 - **Union website.**
 - **Word of mouth.**
- The importance of social media is very likely to increase in the near future. Social media platforms you may barely have heard of have massive followings and their own set of rules, appropriate tones, and social purposes. Millennials who are union members are using social media as much as non-union members, and some platforms even more.
- Many employers have a direct line of mass social engagement with their millennial employees. 41% of millennials follow the company or organization they work for on social media. This means that their employers have a direct line of engagement and influence over a large chunk of this generation. Unions must make sure that their own messaging and framing does not get drowned out.
- The content and tone of social media will be incredibly important to sustain member interest long term.
- Millennial members want to follow their union on social media but need communications to be:
 - **Relevant to them.**
 - **Interesting.**
 - **Entertaining.**
 - **Up-to-date and consistent.**
- Social media communications need an “authentic” voice and not “robot-like” or formal press releases.
- Millennial members also want to see more diverse content from unions on social media:
 - **The environment.**
 - **Other millennial union members.**
 - **Hobbies.**
 - **Lifestyle.**
- Most millennials are already used to viewing this type of content through social media, and an informal, fun and personalized tone is the way the medium is meant to be approached.

PROFILING THE MILLENNIAL MEMBER:

THE APOSTLE



- Less than a quarter of millennial members.
- Pro-union and entrenched in labour movement culture.
- Very active and likely to be and/or has been involved in a union committee.
- More likely to be an older millennial, 30-35 years of age.
- More likely to have been in a union for 6-10+.

Communications:

- » No special communications strategy needed for this audience member.
- » They are very active, consume as much union news and information as possible and are ideologically aligned with the labour movement.
- » They are an ally to all union communications and respond well to all requests for support, message frames and issue content we tested.
- » They are knowledgeable about labour history and have a confident idea of where union dues are spent.

THE UNION BASHER



- Less than 1 in 10 millennial members.
- Anti-union and outright enemies of labour movement culture.
- Completely inactive.
- More likely to be male.
- More likely to live west of Ontario.

Communications:

- » They avoid all union communications unless directly affecting their paycheque or benefits.
- » They are annoyed by their union and do not support the union's views on most issues, believing their union spreads misinformation maliciously.
- » They are opposed to the union either because of negative personal experiences or a conflicting ideological stance.
- » There is very little chance that any amount or style of communications would change this segment's mind.
- » They are more likely to be irritated by "overly sensitive" politically correct culture and feel that the union protects lazy people while hampering good workers like themselves.

THE CHEERLEADER



- About a third of millennial members.
- Pro-union and comfortable with labour movement culture.
- Range from active to not very active (due to personal responsibilities/ lack of time/ logistics).
- More likely to be female.

Communications:

- » Are receptive to labour movement communications and are less likely to criticize union communications as “rhetoric” but are not very educated about labour movement history and their union’s position within wider societal context.
- » They are less likely to know where their union dues are being spent but feel like their union is probably spending them wisely.

THE CYNIC



- About a third of millennial members.
- Pro-union but uncomfortable with labour movement culture.
- Sometimes active in their union but never involved in committees.
- More likely to feel disconnected from labour movement culture.

Communications:

- » This segment understands the necessity of unions, especially to represent their interest during bargaining but they are apathetic to communications not directly related to their workplace, mostly because of what they consider to be “aggressive” tone and “rhetoric”.
- » They prefer a more nuanced and balanced tone on union-employer conflicts.
- » They are more likely to be cynical about where their dues are being spent but unsure where that money actually goes.
- » They are more likely to feel the union is out of touch and not representative of young people.


**1. TAKE SOCIAL MEDIA
SERIOUSLY**

**2. ADJUST YOUR
TONE**

**3. MILLENNIAL-AIMED
CONTENT**

**4. MILLENNIALS TO
MILLENNIALS**





1. It's time to start taking social media communications more seriously.

- Email is obviously extremely important and the best way to currently reach all members.
- However, social media is the fastest-growing form of communication between unions and youth members and provides new opportunities.
- We need to be talking to young workers where they are: use new media to spread information directly to young workers.
- Social media crosses over from the formal, work-oriented tones of email to a more personal and fun experience that millennials enjoy.

2. A tone adjustment is necessary to maximize millennial members' interest in union communications and messaging.

- A third of millennials are turned off by current communications tones.
- They see them as myopic, one-dimensional and unnuanced.
- They desire a more balanced, nuanced and multidimensional tone.

3. Insert more millennial-specific content into union communications.

- Young workers are interested in a more holistic vision of the world – they are interested in issues outside the “labour movement.”
- Articles that touch on the tough economic, career, and financial situations millennials find themselves in are most likely to garner millennial member interest.
- There is also high interest in articles dealing with post-secondary education, debt loads and the rising cost of housing and living in the modern world.

4. Try to use millennials to speak with millennials.

- Millennials don't want to be lectured about their issues by the older generations.
- Older union members communicating about these topics risk looking both ironic and tone-deaf.
- Millennials who are in the same situations themselves are most effective at speaking on these issues.

5. More millennial's education about the labour movement and its historical context within wider societal gains is necessary.

- Many millennial members are not aware of the labour movement's place in history.
- This hampers their understanding and consumption of union messaging about current societal issues.
- Don't assume that younger members realize labour's impact and shaping of current society; explain this context for them.

6. More education and transparency about where union dues are being spent is necessary.

- Many millennial members, even those comfortable with labour movement culture, are not sure where their dues are going and why.
- Greater understanding of this spending increases member affinity to their union.
- Many millennial members are most interested in the humanitarian and local initiatives that their dues go towards.

7. More two-way communication with millennials will bring a greater sense of unity and belonging.

- Millennials really want to have a say in their union but many feel like they are not being included in union discussions. Create opportunities to allow young workers to share feedback and opinions.
- Lack of a forum where millennials feel they are being consulted and heard.
- Consider an online community through which they can consult with their millennial members directly on issues, union stances, requests for support and union processes.

8. Consider focusing on the digitization of union processes.

- Many millennial members see traditional union processes as old-fashioned and inconvenient.
- Meetings and processes that let members view or participate online would increase millennial member participation and improve their view of their union overall.



**5. EDUCATE ABOUT
UNION HISTORY**

**6. EDUCATE ABOUT
UNION DUES**

**7. TWO-WAY
COMMUNICATION**

**8. DIGITIZATION OF
THE PROCESS**

A group of young people are sitting on a bench outdoors. They are all looking at their smartphones. The person in the foreground is wearing a red shirt and light blue jeans. The person next to them is wearing a blue shirt and light blue jeans. The person in the background is wearing a white shirt and light blue jeans. The background is a blurred city street.

**GET SYSTEMATIC ABOUT YOUR
DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND
MEMBER ENGAGEMENT.**

**MEASURE, BENCHMARK, TRACK
AND ADJUST.**

**USE TECHNOLOGY TO CREATE MORE
GRANULAR COMMUNICATIONS.**

MOVING FORWARD

Digital technology is allowing communicators to refine their communication strategies and framing like never before. A host of software suites allow you to segment, target, test, and track your member messaging across different profiles and demographics with a few mouse clicks.

Other platforms allow you to engage with your members by helping you create online communities for exchanging ideas and information.

Explore these potential tools and see if they can help augment your own member initiatives.

SOFTWARE RESOURCES:



