

overdue

# The case for change

A place for unions in modern Australia

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## **About the authors:**

### **Chris Walton:**

Chris has just completed 30 years as a full-time union official. He has worked as a recruiter, an organiser, and an industrial officer in unions representing workers in the finance sector. In 1994 he joined the ACTU to set up and run the Organising Works program; a traineeship for organisers focused on membership growth. He became co-director of the ACTU Organising Centre and in 2002 became ACTU Assistant Secretary. At the ACTU, Chris was the architect of the community component of the highly successful *Your Rights at Work* campaign, set up Unions Australia to facilitate central membership growth and created a strategic campaigning unit to support industry campaigns. In October 2008, Chris became CEO at Professionals Australia, formerly APESMA.

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Erik's professional life has straddled politics, communications and the labour movement. Growing up in Western Australia, Erik worked for State and Federal parliamentarians and for the West Australian Branch of the ALP. Having worked in a London-based communications role for a major investment bank, he returned to Australia in 2000 to take a role at the ALP National Secretariat. Erik became a senior adviser and Chief of Staff to the Education Minister in 2001 and then State Secretary of the Victorian Branch of the ALP. Since 2005, Erik has been the CEO of a major public relations and public affairs firm and run his own communications consultancy, worked at senior levels of the labour movement and was a Chief of Staff during the Rudd Government.

### Introduction

Union leaders don't need to see the graphs to know of our precarious density trends.

The truth is unavoidable: our once pivotal role in Australian society has been eroded and with that, society is weaker because workers lack the strength of a collective voice they could once rely on.

The answer is clear: unions must gain membership in new areas to avoid growing inequality. We've been saying this for many years and there is little evidence of growth outside our diminishing core.

This paper focuses on our ideas to help achieve significant improvement to the current union density level of 15 per cent, 11 percent in the private sector. It is intended as a contribution to debate and the commencement of a process of much needed dialogue in the movement.

### It will get worse

The membership decline trend will only steepen given the transformative influences of digital disruption and societal change.

In the industrial revolution, the progression from the invention of steam power to the first car took two centuries<sup>12</sup>. Just decades after the first desktop computer hit the market, we now carry more powerful computers in our pockets and can connect with people around the world in seconds<sup>3</sup>. It is estimated the current impact of change is 3000 times greater than during the industrial revolution, when unions were born<sup>4</sup>.

If unions maintain focus on their traditional areas only, in many industries this will guarantee decline as the workforce is impacted by structural change – yet even without this level of change unions already face an ageing membership and challenges organising new generations of workers.

The impact of this level of change on workers will be significant. There is likely to be a significant surplus of workers in many areas, with market forces driving down wages and eroding conditions. We've already seen a massive growth in casual and contract work and we are yet to see the full impact of the "Uber" workforce.

The very existence of an employer-employee relationship is changing. The nature of work is changing. An increasing number of Australian workers have no employer. Collective bargaining is largely inaccessible to the vast majority of workers.

### Political and legal context

While we face these myriad challenges, sections of political leadership seem intent on destroying us while a few in the movement load bullets in their rhetorical guns.

Pathways to new awards and agreements are difficult. There are few incentives for capital to enter into voluntary agreements with organised labour. The free market does not often reward individual firms for random acts of kindness. As the opportunity to achieve results becomes harder, the incentive for individual workers to become union members is also receding.

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<sup>1</sup> ThomasNet, Industrial History 'The History of the Steam Engine',  
<http://www.thomasnet.com/articles/custom-manufacturing-fabricating/steam-engine-history>

<sup>2</sup> Library of Congress, 'Who invented the automobile?',  
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/mysteries/auto.html>

<sup>3</sup> Computer History Museum, Timeline of Computer History,  
<http://www.computerhistory.org/timeline/computers/>

<sup>4</sup> Richard Dobbs, James Manyika, and Jonathan Woetzel, 'The four global forces breaking all the trends',  
[http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/strategy/the\\_four\\_global\\_forces\\_breaking\\_all\\_the\\_trends](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/strategy/the_four_global_forces_breaking_all_the_trends)

### Greater need for unions

Just like the environment of the Industrial Revolution created the environment for the birth of large-scale unions, the scale of change workers will face will create an enormous need for unions.

There will be many winners and losers. Unions must be relevant to a workforce facing unprecedented levels of change and will remain more needed than ever to fight for a fair and just society.

### This paper

This paper aims to generate a discussion among unions and other progressive groups on how we should respond. It makes the case for change and proposes suggestions for consideration. The authors recognise a paper on 'the basics' of organising in traditional areas is also warranted. This paper has relevance to that organising, but focuses on organising in new areas, essential for us to represent the modern workforce and to achieve a wholesale shift in density levels.

### Learning from others

We are not the only membership based organisations researching and identifying solutions.

We have digested many books and articles providing analysis and advice for membership-based organisations. These include:

- Harrison Coerver and Mary Byers, *The Race for Relevance and Road to Relevance*;
- Richard Dobbs, James Manyika, and Jonathan Woetzel, 'The four global forces breaking all the trends';
- Kyle Sexton, 'reMEMBERSHIP, New Thinking for Tomorrow's Membership Organization';
- Sheri Jacobs, 'The Art of Membership', Josey Bass, San Francisco;
- Robbie Kellman Baxter, 'The Membership Economy';
- ASAE, '7 Measures of Success'.

We would also like to acknowledge the valuable input from many in the movement and from Essential Media.

What is important here is that while we have done some research, it represents just the start of what we could have done and there is further research examination and sharing which must continue to be done.

We welcome constructive criticism and suggestions. We look forward to discussion with others so we can learn and find better solutions.

### Executive Summary

#### Workers and Unions Face Unprecedented Change

With union density level of 15 per cent, 11 percent in the private sector, unions must gain membership in new areas to avoid growing inequality.

Membership decline will only hasten given an ageing membership the inevitable structural change driven by digital disruption and globalisation.

The impact on workers of this level of change will be significant. Just like the environment of the Industrial Revolution led to the birth of large-scale unions, the scale of change workers are facing creates an enormous ongoing need for unions.

#### We must find a model to organise in non-union areas

Unions make a rational decision to focus on an increasingly narrow group of workers in our core areas because we lack a successful model and cost structure to confidently organise in new areas.

Innovation is needed as bargaining is largely inaccessible to most workers and many workers do not want to join at the price we ask, for what we are offering. Research shows the younger generation are cynical about any offer, will make a cost benefit analysis on the value of joining and are unlikely to join for philosophical reasons.

Our case for membership is weakened by Enterprise Agreements, Awards, and National Employment Standards benefiting non-members and members alike. Workers in non-union sectors may lack hope we can meet their needs, issues and concerns, given bargaining is unrealistic and inaccessible and the award system has been emasculated with extremely limited access to arbitration.

These facts are no guarantee of decline, they are however a guarantee that those that fail to innovate will fail.

#### Suggestions for Innovation

Organising the new workforce can take many forms and we must not be limited by our current model for membership. Our primary model of organisers and industrial officers in the field is expensive. Generally membership is binary: you are either a member or you are not; there is no 'half way house' or tiers to membership engagement (other than for part-time and lower paid workers). We need to innovate.

#### Suggestion: unions introduce new membership models.

Unions cannot be a one trick pony, by only offering bargaining and only helping workers as long as they are concentrated in large numbers. We need a model that enables us to go into areas that would be otherwise unviable.

The following four options could be utilised as a starting point for discussion:

##### 1. Supporters

Build a huge database, seeking supporter of issues rather than institutions, which is utilised in campaigns, as a source of donations and as a base for leads into other forms of membership. Supporters do not pay fees.

### 2. New Area Members

Introduce a low fee and low cost model to reach large numbers of workers in currently non-union areas utilising social media, online campaigning and comprehensive campaigning strategies e.g. impacting on corporate image. Social media becomes the 'spider web' to connect with thousands of potential members. Fees may be \$1-2 a week and bargaining is unlikely to be included in the short run. The package of services will be dependent on research into the worker's needs and alternate sources of income may be identified, such as a proportion of back pay recovered.

### 3. Package or non-collective members

Develop a lower cost membership package with services tailored to meet the needs of the target potential members, unlikely to include bargaining or high level industrial representation. Fees may be \$300-\$400 p.a.

### 4. Collective members

Current full-service membership. All members under collective agreements must take this membership option.

#### **Suggestion: unions continue to evolve into organisations that broaden beyond industrial**

Successful unions offer a package of services, while remaining true to their core purpose. The services that are provided are based on research into member's needs. This could include providing a voice on industry issues, career development and training, financial planning, professional accreditation and insurances.

#### **Suggestion: unions enable the workers being organised to have their own identity**

Unions need to ensure the workers they are attempting to organise can readily identify with and have a place in the union.

#### **Suggestion: peak bodies to build some common new services**

The services we offer must be of high quality and aligned with our core purpose and the potential member's needs. Where unions have already developed useful services, peak bodies should fast track access to these services for other unions.

#### **Suggestion: unions consider introducing new membership packages**

For most unions, one membership package is offered with discounts for part-time and lower paid members. It is important unions find a way to offer different membership packages, particularly for workers who are not under collective agreements, but avoid cannibalising existing members. Existing members under collective agreements may only be offered full membership.

#### **Suggestion: identify a practical solution to enable members to move jobs without re-joining.**

The logic of members being able to move jobs without re-joining remains a compelling one which we must find a practical solution.

#### **Suggestion: individual unions and peak bodies consider the potential to further centralise servicing**

The orthodox view we have always held is that the costs of servicing individuals is higher than representing members in collectives. This is not necessarily the case. If we are to organise in growing parts of the economy we will need to have efficient capacity to deal with bullying, sexual harassment, underpayments and other issues.

### **Freeing up resources**

The union movement needs to free up resources to enable the delivery of new services and to enable an investment into new areas. Three areas could generate huge resource savings.

#### **1. Suggestion: unions combine to develop and implement new packages of services**

As many of the services provided by the unions are similar, a group of unions could group together to deliver those services more effectively and efficiently.

#### **2. Suggestion: peak bodies allocate staff to facilitate the collective purchases of a range of services and products**

Enormous sums could be saved by centralising the procurement of services such as phone contracts, purchase or lease of vehicles and computers.

#### **3. Suggestion: unions consider combined efforts to reduce backend costs.**

Unions spend a considerable proportion of their income on back-end operation including membership processing, accounts and finance and ICT services (approx. 20%). Huge savings are possible through a more efficient delivery of these operational services. If the union movement could reduce that cost by 5 percentage points, it is estimated the movement would free up **\$51 million**. Options to achieve this include: individual unions centralising operations such as membership processing or a group of unions combining to agree services are delivered through an external body or through a jointly owned company.

### **Suggestion: the situation for workers in non-union sectors highlights the need to seek new industrial regulation**

As we highlight the situation for workers in non-union sectors, the case for regulation to keep up with a changing labour force should be made. Our levers to improve the situation of workers under the current industrial laws are limited, with the bargaining system a dismal failure for workers in many largely non-union areas. Workers need: a functioning award system backed by conciliation and arbitration; an ability to achieve sector or industry outcomes that take wages out of competition; regulation that protects employees applying to 'workers' including contractors; tribunals able to address unfair contracts.

### **Suggestion: we should debate union agreements, which only apply to union members**

The 'free rider' poses a major challenge. We should debate the option that unions, if they choose, can conclude agreements where the benefits only apply to union members, as non-members have not paid for the service. The risk of the employer undercutting union labour exists, but may be mitigated through effective organising.

### **Suggestion: develop effective capacity to organise and campaign internationally**

Given the inevitable expansion of globalisation, it is essential unions develop an effective capacity to organise and campaign internationally against multinational corporations. Global union federations must continue to reform to enable success.

### **Suggestion: continue to progress industry strategy**

Successful unions provide a voice for the workforce in each industry, and work with others to address industry issues.

### **Suggestion: rebuild our capacity to develop skills and support change.**



Leaders must be supported to drive change. Staff and workplace leaders need the skills necessary to implement our plans.

### **Suggestion: improve the image of unions by reaching out to workers in the non-union sectors**

The best way to strengthen our image is to demonstrate we care about workers. Our efforts to go into areas that we currently avoid will signal to the community that workers need unions and that unions care about workers.

### **The change process**

Key steps in a successful change process may include:

- 1) Give staff and honourees permission and encouragement to think differently, to innovate and to be wrong.
- 2) Conduct **non-member and member research** on your brand and services.
- 3) Conduct an **audit of member services and your offer** for attractiveness, effectiveness and alignment to core purpose.
- 4) **Decide on areas and avenues for growth** and calibrate your offer and services.
- 5) **Examine your membership model** for cost and tiered engagement. Check your offer again with research.
- 6) **Develop a new package** unique to each potential member group. Hire the staff skills to develop and manage those new services.
- 7) **Harness technology.** Invest in people who can analyse data (not simply manage it), create engaging content, organise online and develop new tools (or apply old ones in new ways).
- 8) Using **modern tactics** such as social media, engagement in campaigns through petitions, e-mails and fundraising, construct a tiered engagement which leads to the 'ask' to join. Use this engagement to add strength to your advocacy and build credibility.
- 9) **Revisit and refine.** Aim to regularly repeat the conduct of this process.

### **Suggestion: ACTU auspice member research for affiliates on barriers to membership, the desired package of services and price points which would attract potential members to join**

Ultimately each union needs research for a particular sector, but all unions could benefit from central research and the collation of research done by each union.

### **Suggestion: harness the technologies and employ staff with appropriate skill sets**

In order to properly utilise the advantages of new technologies, we need specialist skills.

It is our members and potential members that must drive the change in our movement: we should ask them what they want and adapt so that we can deliver it to them as best we can. This is the way to survive and grow as a movement. To meet the challenges of the future, we must reduce barriers to entry, improve services and meet the expectations of the modern workers by providing different models and tailored options for membership.

### The barriers to organising in new areas

While areas in which unions have members have been impacted by restructuring, globalisation and industry change, we continue to concentrate on improving our density in a dwindling pool.

With a few exceptions, there is limited evidence of unions organising outside traditional areas, and certainly not to scale. For many unions, success in 'infill' organising does not match the exits created by restructure.

Just 15% of all workers are members of trade unions and despite small blips the downward trajectory continues<sup>5</sup>. A growing perception that unions are focused on an increasing narrow group of workers who pay membership fees, rather than the workers more broadly is therefore rooted in truth. A vibrant, growing movement would do much to change perceptions, but the reality is the opposite. It is not as though we don't see the need or that we lack the ability to care about workers more generally, beyond our immediate membership. Why then, as a whole, haven't we succeeded in organising the new workforce? If it is our model, we must change it. If it a lack of resources, we must find them and if it is conservatism, we must cast it aside, because without change, and without growth, unions will further decline and more workers will be hurt.

### It's rational not to organise greenfield sites

Unions are often making a rational decision by not going into greenfield areas because it would be difficult to justify an expenditure of members' resources in areas where there is no guarantee of success and low current membership. Union leaders are often making often rational decisions to allocate resources to traditional areas rather than take risks with members' resources.

There are many barriers to organising new areas including employer hostility and laws that work against greenfield work. In many ways we are swimming against the tide. There is often no history or consciousness of unions and the times when it was positive for your career to be active in the union seem a distant memory.

Most unions just don't have a model to go into those areas with any confidence of success, and the diverse needs of workers across different industries make the formation of a formal model rather difficult. Rather than feel guilty about not supporting workers in non-union areas, we need to identify a different model that will have greater chance of success.

### Research on attitude of potential members- our experience

It is not just the laws and employers that create difficulties in organising in greenfield sites, we need to face the reality the workers are not always enamoured with our solution, services or price.

Like most unions, we have always conducted member satisfaction surveys, to gauge the sentiment of our membership. Recently we have done extensive research into the attitudes of potential members in new areas in which we are focusing. This research was a dispiriting process, but was essential to reform.

The research found that potential members:

- Make a cost benefit analysis on the value of joining;
- Are unlikely to join multiple organisations;
- Are the first generation of the digital age, expecting to find most of what they need online for free, including information, services and networking;
- Wish to select services they use;

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, '6333.0 - Characteristics of Employment, Australia, August 2014', <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6333.0>.

- Want services that progress their career;
- Were interested in our campaigns and understood that if successful, this was good for them, however they were unwilling to join just for campaigns (but may be willing to fund the campaign if it directly benefited them).

As a result, we changed our offer and undertook further research. While this time they liked many aspects of the package, they openly discussed the costs versus the benefits and concluded the package certainly did not add up to our annual fee of \$680.

Out of sheer frustration, we tested the collective concept. We insisted on a topic being presented to the participants about the problem of an occupation acting purely as individuals- that it is ultimately self-defeating if workers do not all contribute towards the common good. If we had been dispirited previously, we were now maudlin.

It has to be acknowledged that there is a widespread trend towards lesser civic involvement and we are fighting this trend. Volunteering Australia, reporting on the *ABS General Social Survey* state that “Volunteering in Australia peaked in 2010 at 36%; in 2014 that rate fell to 31%... Community participation also declined in other areas... Political involvement fell by 5%... Involvement in other social groups declined by 4%”<sup>6</sup>. Membership organisations are struggling to recruit and retain members.

What became clear to us is that the days where joining was ‘what you do’ are long gone. Relying on a philosophical commitment to ‘we’ vs ‘me’ is optimistic at best, but that does not mean we can’t ultimately organise these people into a collective.

This is very challenging, as it requires us to find out what workers want in particular areas and ensure we are delivering it – as marketing people call it, customer or member focus!

### Psychology of the offer

The research presented a further challenge. Even if we offered the right services at the right price, we not only had to understand the package people wanted; there was clearly a psychology to how potential members approached any offer.

The research found the potential members were:

- Highly cynical as they are constantly sold to and are sometimes dealing with organisations online who have little substance behind them and wanted assurance we are credible;
- Unaware that we were not for profit and member owned (we hadn’t told them) and became more positive with this news;
- Became far more favourable on hearing there was a money back guarantee and/or a free trial (which nearly every organisation offers except most unions);
- Didn’t want to pay for services they don’t use (the opposite to collectivism);
- Wanted to be able to select the services or the package (even if the selection led them to the full package; and what the capacity to easily opt out).

Our attempted response to this research can be seen in part in the **Case Study** on Professionals Australia which is available.

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<sup>6</sup> Volunteering Australia, ‘Media Backgrounder: Key findings: 2014 ABS General Social Survey’, <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Media-Release-ABS-General-Social-Survey.pdf>.

### The harsh reality

The research highlighted the difficulties in organising new areas. The challenge is not just hostile employers and bad laws, in many areas potential members didn't want to buy what we offered at all and for many, what we offered cost too much.

If the potential member is making a cost benefit analysis, the fact is that our main offer of bargaining benefits non-members and members alike. This encourages 'free riders' and hides the value of the wage premium that union members typically receive over employees in non-union workplaces.

Awards, minimum wages and National Employment Standards provide a base level of protection for workers, whether union members or not. Enforcement of conditions can be achieved for free through the Fair Work Ombudsman. Many employees are on individual contracts and a few may achieve better outcomes through career advancement than through an EBA outcome. It is little surprise we are facing major difficulties.

Further, workers are sceptical about joining if they lack hope. In many industries, it is extremely difficult to achieve improvements for workers, given the obstacles to bargaining and the difficulties of utilising the award system to achieve real progress. Workers assess the likely success of our campaigns. Our dwindling density will do little to alleviate concerns about our ability to affect change for workers: we are in a vicious cycle from which we now have to escape.

### Our conclusion

These facts are no guarantee of decline, they are however a guarantee that those that fail to innovate will drift into irrelevance.

Does this all mean we have to give up on creating a collective? Of course not, but it does mean that we need to alter our approach. It means we need to truly understand what workers want in particular areas and ensure our organisations are aligned to meet those needs, issues and concerns.

We're in a process of change, which can be seen in more detail in our **Case Study**. We in no way believe we are close to the full answer. We do not suggest our particular changes are right for all unions. We have much more to do and welcome engagement with other unions to seek ideas, opinions, encouragement and criticism.

Many of the things we have done have surprised us. If we are seriously member driven, we must be open to real change.

### Growing membership for a stronger Australia

When the Secretary of the ACTU recently asked a meeting of affiliates whether they ever envisaged the union movement looking as it does currently, he was left with muted silence.

Membership numbers in the union movement are a symptom of us not adapting rapidly enough to a changed environment, which, to be fair, has galloped ahead of us. We must be willing to change when there is objective evidence that current approaches may be failing us or at least are inadequate and for many of us now, that truth is inarguable.

Our membership model, the way we service members, the way we use new technologies and social media, what we offer, how we present and how we best use resources all warrant detailed discussion.

Organising the new workforce can take many forms and we shouldn't be limited by our current model for membership, which suffers from one major flaw: many people do not want to join at the price we offer, for what we are offering. They do not believe that the value justifies the cost. They lack hope we are there for them and can meet their needs, issues and concerns.

We retain strength, with 1.7 million members and relative financial stability across the movement. We have the capacity to invest and make change before change is further forced upon us and we are best able to do this by openly sharing our experiences and our thoughts and capitalising on effective strategies.

In this section we put forward suggestions for discussion and debate.

### A narrow focus and the free rider problem

For the most part, we have a membership model with workplace bargaining at its heart. Without a breadth to the offer, our value is limited for many and could place a handbrake on member recruitment.

Workers don't have to join the union to enjoy the benefits of their enterprise bargaining negotiations in the workplace. The number of people receiving the benefits of union endeavour far outweighs the actual membership of unions. Some 43.5% of employees rely on a State or Federal registered Collective Agreement for their wages and conditions and some 20 per cent rely on the relevant Award<sup>7</sup>. It is a matter of simple mathematics that in what should be areas of strength, our current membership model still sees us underperforming.

At present the prospect of organising the 'free riders' poses a major challenge. The challenge of how to combat an increasing trend towards free riding is one which we have to rise to meet.

Few of us have had success with the guilt and gratitude arguments. The guilt argument is: "other members are paying for you to benefit from union negotiations: you need to contribute", yet these people receive the same level of support in workplace bargaining negotiations as if they were union members. The gratitude pitch is: "look at everything the union has done for you". Very few organisations will reach success by asking people to pay for services they have received in the past.

**Guilt and gratitude rarely work**

We have achieved significant success by organising around the workers issues and empowering them to realise that together they have a greater chance of success. Unfortunately, many unions describe a drop-off in members after a successful bargaining campaign.

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Government Department of Employment, 'Trends In Federal Enterprise Bargaining September quarter 2015', Department of Employment, Canberra.

A further problem is that bargaining is not practical for large proportions of the workforce, particularly workers in smaller workplaces, which represent a large proportion of the overall workforce. Most employed Australians aren't covered by enterprise agreements, at less than 44 per cent. One million Australians work as contractors and 2.2 million – or 19 per cent have no leave entitlements: they are on casual workplace arrangements<sup>89</sup>. With nearly 12 million Australians in employment, we as a movement are effectively turning a deaf ear to the majority of Australians who are working, focussing instead on a minority of workers who work in collectivised areas that are increasingly not unionised<sup>10</sup>. The exception is our work to maintain the award safety net. Unfortunately, the award system has been emasculated and there is extremely limited access to arbitration.

Unions continue to deliver successes for workers<sup>11</sup>. It is well documented that unionised workforces fair better from the perspective of pay, as "(t)he estimated union wage effect varies from 3 to 10 per cent"<sup>12</sup>, making a real difference to the lives of workers and their families. However, non-union workers within these workplaces benefit equally from better income and conditions.

The conventional wisdom of extending the benefits of union negotiations to non-union members needs to be revisited. We are providing a service at considerable expense which is benefitting a large number of non-members.

### Expensive and binary membership options and fee structures

Our primary model of unionism is not only proving ineffective, it is expensive. It requires a multitude of field staff – or organisers – to visit workplaces and deal with individual grievances, recruit and retain members, negotiate with employers and represent workers in negotiations. Typically the union will provide a car as well as wages and conditions at least commensurate with that of

**Many unions are narrowly focussed and have an expensive and ineffective membership model.**

members. As union density diminishes, demands on organisers become greater, with fewer workers spread over multiple sites. Our delegate structures assist greatly, but there is little respect by employers for their role in many workplaces.

Hefty fees are being charged to cover the cost of labour-intensive union models with fees for a selection of unions amounting to an average of approximately \$650pa. Membership is binary: you are either a member or you are not; there is no 'half way house' or tiers to membership engagement (generally with the exception of lower rates for part-timers and casuals). With average earning in Australia at approximately \$80,000 per annum, or about \$1,170<sup>1314</sup> per week after tax, we are making union membership a premium purchase, especially so for those who join for philosophical reasons or who are not party to a

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Unions, 'Casual Workers', [http://www.australianunions.org.au/casual\\_workers\\_factsheet](http://www.australianunions.org.au/casual_workers_factsheet)

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, '6359.0 - Forms of Employment, Australia, November 2012', <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/6359.0Main%20Features3November%202012?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6359.0&issue=November%202012&num=&view=>

<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, '6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, Nov 2015', <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6202.0>.

<sup>11</sup> Essential Report, 'Federal Voting Intention', <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/category/essentialreport>.

<sup>12</sup> Lixin Cai and Amy YC Liu, Union Wage Effects in Australia: Is There Variation along the Distribution?, [https://crawford.anu.edu.au/pdf/staff/amy\\_liu/ecor\\_513.pdf](https://crawford.anu.edu.au/pdf/staff/amy_liu/ecor_513.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Assumes gross weekly earnings of \$1540.00 per week, Australian residency, individual not claiming tax offsets, Medicare levy exemption or reduction and does not have a Student Financial Supplement Scheme (SFSS) debt.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Taxation Office, 'Tax Withheld Calculator', <https://www.ato.gov.au/calculators-and-tools/tax-withheld-calculator/>.

collective agreement<sup>15</sup>. In an era of relatively low unemployment, workers are left to weigh their job security with the portability of their skills, their relationship with their employer, their own advocacy skills and the competing financial needs of their families against the expertise provided by a union. They do this knowing they have an option of going to a law firm or one of the many IR consultancies if they get into difficulty. Much information can be obtained online, and as stated earlier, the Fair Work ombudsman is available.

Unfortunately, they don't realise without collective power little real change can be achieved.

The fact that fees are tax deductible is only relevant once a year, at tax time. In the meantime, members have to find the full fee.

### Selected union membership fees\*

Union	PSA NSW	CFMEU Vic	CEPU (Plumbers NSW)	AEU Vic	AMWU	ASU (Private Sector Vic)	Average
Fee	\$718.60	\$700.00	\$703.00	\$686.15	\$634.20	\$551.20	\$665.5

\* Fees for full-time worker on or above Australian average FTE taken as sample, 2015 rates<sup>16</sup>.

Unions do not have the levels of access to workers which they enjoyed in the past and yet we have been reluctant as a movement to embrace new models of collectivising and building communities.

### Innovation

As a movement we need to explore new models of membership. Innovation is the buzzword at the moment. It is a word we have been using internally long before the Prime Minister, but it will be key to the future of the Australian union movement.

There are many definitions, but for us it has been a journey of honestly analysing our situation and environment and being open to doing things differently and being wrong. What we have learnt is that there is a cost in not taking risk: maintaining the status quo means decline and a decline in influence for unions and for workers in society. That's what innovation is really about: meeting the new today with solutions that are not bound by the past. A failure to innovate will see us follow steadily the path of other industries in decline.

With only 15% density, it's time for us to take a chance: to innovate, because the cost of continuing how we are is just too high.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 6302.0 - Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, May 2015, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6302.0/>

<sup>16</sup> CFMEU Victoria, 'How to join', <http://www.cfmeuvic.com.au/member-services/join-today>; AEU Victorian Branch, 'Membership rates 2015', [http://www.aeuvic.asn.au/subscription\\_rates.pdf](http://www.aeuvic.asn.au/subscription_rates.pdf); PSA NSW Branch, 'PSA Fees - 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016', <http://psa.asn.au/psa-fees-1-july-2015-to-30-june-2016/>; CEPU of Australia Plumbing Div. (NSW) 'Union Membership Fees (from 01/04/2015)', <http://www.nswplumbersunion.com.au/join%20now/COMPLETE%20Union%20Fees%20break%20down.pdf>; ASU Victoria Private Sector Branch, 'Join the ASU', <http://asuvic.org/about/join/>, AMWU, [https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/amwu/pages/294/attachments/original/1440738961/2015\\_DUES\\_Monthly\\_2015.pdf?1440738961](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/amwu/pages/294/attachments/original/1440738961/2015_DUES_Monthly_2015.pdf?1440738961)

Similar challenges to other industries?

Although manufacturing faces unique challenges, we found the analysis on how manufacturing needs to innovate and move to advanced manufacturing thought provoking.

One publication suggested those in manufacturing “need not just to lift their game, but to change the game they play”<sup>17</sup>. They described the shift from traditional to advanced manufacturing and we have considered a potential corollary for unions, and this is outlined below.

Traditional Manufacturing	Advanced Manufacturing	Traditional Unionism	Innovative Unionism
Focused on production of goods.	Focused on value creation-services and manufacturing geared towards a tailored experience for customers.	Focused on bargaining and workplace advice and support.	Industrial plus services tailored for different member groups.
Predominantly blue-collar roles with technical competence.	Wider skill base with both technical and commercial competencies.	Predominantly organising and industrial skills.	Wider skill base to meet core needs plus skills to organise online and meet other identified needs e.g. career support.
Firms operate individually and compete based on their own strength.	Competitiveness based on the ability to collaborate and network-access ideas, information and capabilities, engage in webs of activity.	Operate individually with collective behaviour predominantly limited to single bargaining units and election campaigns.	Extensive collaboration and networking, shared backend capacity, exchange of innovations and intellectual property.
Mass production – any colour is so long as it’s black.	Rapid adaption to exploit changes in technology, markets and customer demand. Strong customer orientation with capacity to provide niche solutions.	One offer.	Packages to suit the needs of particular member groups.

‘Disrupting beliefs: a new approach to business – model innovation’<sup>18</sup> was written for industries facing digital disruption, and some of the analysis is thought provoking for unions and has application.

The authors suggest business models now are less durable than they used to be and are subject to rapid displacement, disruption, and, in extreme cases, outright destruction and that every industry is built around long-standing, often implicit, beliefs about how to operate. These beliefs reflect assumptions about customer preferences, the role of technology and the basis of competition – they are often considered immutable, until someone comes along to violate them, much like retail believed before online retail swamped them.

**Suggestion: that unions introduce new membership models.**

The authors suggest an extremely confronting process to help sectors rethink and get ahead of the change curve<sup>19</sup>:

<sup>17</sup> Australian Industry Group, ‘Advanced Manufacturing, A Smarter approach for Australia’, [http://www.aigroup.com.au/portal/binary/com.epicentric.contentmanagement.servlet.ContentDeliveryServlet/LIVE\\_CONTENT/Publications/Reports/2014/CEDA%2520Advanced%2520Manufacturing%2520AiGroup%2520final.pdf](http://www.aigroup.com.au/portal/binary/com.epicentric.contentmanagement.servlet.ContentDeliveryServlet/LIVE_CONTENT/Publications/Reports/2014/CEDA%2520Advanced%2520Manufacturing%2520AiGroup%2520final.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Marc de Jong and Menno van Dijk, ‘Disrupting beliefs: a new approach to business – model innovation’ [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/innovation/disrupting\\_beliefs\\_a\\_new\\_approach\\_to\\_business-model\\_innovation](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/innovation/disrupting_beliefs_a_new_approach_to_business-model_innovation)

<sup>19</sup> Steps: Outline the dominant model in your industry eg. collective-bargaining; Dissect the most important long held belief into it supporting notions e.g. members needs are met through bargaining; Turn an underlining belief on its head-formulating a radical new hypothesis, one that no one wants to



The application to unions requires much thought. We must consider whether we are best using the opportunities from new digital tools and whether we have locked ourselves into a model bound by workplace bargaining? We must examine whether we are adequately member focused and work together to innovate and share both ideas and resources across the movement.

### Potential new membership models

It may be useful to have a starting point for discussion about what new membership models may look like for some unions. We outline three new models of membership, in addition to our current model. These four models are placed in a table below and then described in more detail.

The four models are:

**1. Supporters**

Build a huge database based on issues rather than institutions which is utilised in campaigns, as a source of donations and as a base for leads into other forms of membership.

**2. New Area Members**

Low fee and low cost model to reach large numbers of workers in currently non-union areas utilising social media, online campaigning and comprehensive campaigning strategies eg. impacting on corporate image.

**3. Package for non-collective members**

A lower cost membership package with services tailored to meet the needs of the target potential members, unlikely to include bargaining or high level industrial representation.

**4. Collective members**

Current full-service membership. All members under collective agreements must take this membership option.

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believe; Sanity test your re-frame – look at what’s happening in other industries; Translate the reframe belief into a new model.

	Engagement	Services	Resourcing	Cost
<b>1.Supporters</b>	Build a database based on interests and issues using website, email and social media. Database to be used in campaigns; used to crowd-fund and are potential leads to transfer into other membership types below.	None, bar e-mail and social media interaction.	Online campaigner, researcher, media support.  Provision of campaign resources .	<b>FREE.</b>
<b>2.New Area Members</b>	Workers in particular sector organised online utilising website, email, and social media plus area meet ups (possibly online).  Leaders identified through activities and supported, largely online.  Campaign activities organised.	As determined by research. May include: wage enforcement; class actions, contract reviews, campaign actions against unscrupulous employers, insurance, discount tools or uniforms.	Package to be limited-unlikely to include bargaining or high level representation without additional fee.  Needs strategic campaigner, online organiser, researcher, media support, call centre.	<b>\$1-2 per week</b> (approx.).  Exploration of alternate sources of income (e.g. proportion of wages recovered).
<b>3.Non-collective or 'package' members</b>	Optional and lower cost membership package offered by website, online advertising, social media and potentially field staff.	As determined by research. May include: Online information, industry campaigns, insurances; seminars, basic industrial advice; career services, market rates advice, industry outlooks, financial planning.  Does not include bargaining.	As above, but also members service centre staff, career staff, communications staff.	<b>\$300-400</b> (approx.)  Could offer selected services at an additional cost.
<b>4.Collective member</b>	Traditional organising.  Website, email, social media.	Full service.	Full resources required, especially field staff.	<b>\$700</b> (approx.)

There are many permutations and combinations to the above options. Below we expand on some of these options.

### Building a supporter base

A favourite additional pitch to potential members has been that unions campaign for a better, fairer Australia: "By adding your voice, we turn the volume up for our cause with decision makers and make change".

Crowd-funding and a proliferation of activist groups has meant Australians can choose the issues about which they wish to be activists. Rather than be beholden to support a suite of causes in which the labour movement is involved by way of membership, activists can target their voice where they feel it is needed most: to issues that specifically matter to them.

Right now, you can simultaneously work to save the Great Barrier Reef, end indigenous inequality and campaign for marriage equality from your lounge room just by contributing directly to campaigns of your choosing or being active on social media. GetUp! is often cited as the premier example of crowdfunding, but many organisations are taking campaign fundraising into their own hands, going direct to potential donors and harnessing hundreds if not thousands of supporters to amplify the importance of their cause to decision makers. Nearly 24,000 Australians support the *Fight for the Reef* campaign<sup>20</sup>, while recently a petition was “signed by more than 51,000 Australians calling on Woolworths to get the con out of their 12,000-plus poker machines”<sup>21</sup> while thousands of Australians supported Animals Australia’s campaign to end greyhound industry exports, triggering policy changes by airlines which limits this industry<sup>22</sup>.

**Suggestion: that the union movement build a central database of supporters, and target 2.5 million.**

Progressive causes can – and do – attract widespread support in Australia. However, they do so without an ongoing financial commitment on an opt-in basis. The model of these campaigns is largely similar: they ask people to support their causes as the first tier of engagement. They may then ask them to become a financial supporter of the cause or in the case of some, join the organisation or make an ongoing commitment.

The list or database is built utilising issues. The supporter is not ‘joining’ an institution, nor are they necessarily supporting the institution. People are likely to be more active around issues rather than commit to an institution, particularly the younger generation.

The institution is providing a means to act on the individuals concern regarding the issue. This may be a step on a ladder of engagement.

Given our base of 1.7 million members, our resources and campaigning capacity, it is difficult to understand why the union movement has fewer online supporters than groups such as GetUp. While efforts are currently underway to improve our supporter base, these efforts need to be scaled and we must confront the data storage issues. Larger supporters list must be built through a variety of issues and campaigns, but stored in one database.

We have seen the power of a large database in industry, community and political campaigns. These supporters can be a source of donations as well as engage in online and off-line campaigning activity. The supporters are also a source of leads for membership.

To do this properly requires skilled online campaigners dedicated to building the supporter community.

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<sup>20</sup> Fight for the Reef, <http://fightforthereef.org.au/?gclid=CNGRsrnNgsoCFUccvAodhw0CMw>.

<sup>21</sup> GetUp!, ‘GetUp hijacks Woolworths’ ‘Make Your Christmas Famous’ ads to expose how Woolies poker machines are designed to addict’, <https://www.getup.org.au/about/media-room>, last accessed December 30, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Animals Australia, ‘QANTAS says no more greyhound exports following Animals Australia investigation’, <http://www.animalsaustralia.org/features/qantas-says-no-more-greyhound-exports.php-to-asia.php>, last accessed December 29, 2015.

### Organising new areas

Social networks have lowered the cost of connecting people to zero: networking has become unfiltered and open source, another challenge which we have largely failed to meet but must find a way to harness<sup>23</sup>.

**Social media and 'clicktivism' represents both a threat and an opportunity for the movement.**

While the proliferation of online networks, information and campaigning presents major and pressing challenges for the movement, it also presents myriad opportunity. Social media should make organising easier and more cost effective because the majority of workers are able to be connected by using new communications technologies. The plethora of information available online makes tailored material a premium product as we struggle to distil and aggregate increasing variety and volume to what is relevant to us. There has been real growth in news aggregation services across a variety of streams of interest.

In the many areas of the economy where it is not logical to organise in a traditional way we should try a new model based on researching the workers needs, issues and concerns and utilising digital technology to reduce the costs of organising.

Rather than allocate organisers at a ratio of approximately 1 to 500 members or potential members, we should trial organising with significantly less staff involved.

New skill sets are required. We need to understand the industry, its issues and stakeholders. We must understand the workers attitudes and aspirations as well as their issues. Skilled online campaigners and organisers, backed up by staff capable of developing compelling content and achieving media, are essential.

The social media becomes the 'spider web' to connect with thousands of potential members. This network only grows through compelling content, which connects with the workforce.

In our pharmacy campaign we attempted for years to organise site by site. With few pharmacists per site, it was a dismal failure. After research, we developed a new brand, and package and our skilled online campaigner has now built the Professional Pharmacists Australia Facebook page to over 6600 at the time of publication. That represents nearly half the workforce. That reach would have required millions of dollars of organiser time to achieve anywhere near the same result.

This spider web only provides the opportunity, with innovative activity required to generate contact details. Online and phone follow-up, dramatically reduces the cost of organising. Activists can be identified by their level of online activity and activist development can be provided largely online.

**Suggestion: trial low-cost organising in a new area.**

Results depend on many factors including the strength of the issues and the level of awareness we can achieve. Our pharmacists campaign has been supported by an active presence in industry media, significant 'voice' activity including submissions, an improved package including continuing professional development and professional indemnity insurance (more information in **Case Study**).

When organising in new areas utilising lower cost and more efficient approaches to organise, the opportunity arises to seek a significantly lower fee- for example, one or two dollars per week. This may provide the opportunity to achieve membership scale.

To progress the workers needs issues and concerns may also involve utilising innovative approaches and in many areas bargaining is unrealistic. The workers in a particular sector may not want bargaining in its traditional form. Options to improve the situation of workers, at least in the short

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<sup>23</sup> Kyle Sexton, 'reMEMBERSHIP, New Thinking for Tomorrow's Membership Organization', Incplant, Salem, Oregon, 2011, p75.

run, may include highlighting the behaviour of corporates, impacting their brand, through to running a class action to achieve results.

The lessons we have learnt from industry strategic or comprehensive campaigning should be deployed. This requires a detailed understanding of the industry and power structures to identify effective strategies. By assisting in resolving industry issues, stakeholders may increase their cooperation.

The workers may want support to stop sexual harassment, secure award conditions, advice on individual contracts, access to low-cost courses which enable them to access work or progress their career, discounts on required uniforms, a voice in their industry to address the issues that are the real cause of their problems - to name a few. Often we are dealing with symptoms rather than the cause, and bargaining is not the solution to many industry-based problems.

The funding of the campaign may also be innovative. As others, such as Michael Crosby, have suggested, the funding of the campaign may be secured in part by seeking some reimbursement from the outcomes of successful legal action. The supporters group may also donate towards the campaign. With low fees, parents and grandparents may pay for the members fees. Philanthropists could also support the campaign, as well as stakeholders in the industry who support the broader goals of addressing industry issues.

Our package must meet the needs of the workers. We cannot be a one trick pony, by only offering bargaining and only helping workers as long as they are concentrated in large numbers. We need a model that enables us to go into areas that would be otherwise unviable.

### Broadening our offer

There are models of success in the Australian union movement which, at least in part, demonstrate the potential of broadening our offer. Those unions who have success usually are member-focused organisations, who offer a package of services and provide a voice for their members on their industry or professional issues in their industry, while remaining true to their core purpose.

Many of these successful unions resemble more a modern 'Guild' than a narrow focused trade union. They are as active around the circumstances of the occupation or profession as they are around wages and conditions. They focus on career development and often the training issues, as well as industrial issues. They campaign on industry issues as much as they campaign in workplaces around bargaining. They offer a package of services to members which go beyond just industrial.

The Stonemasons society won the first eight-hour day in the world. Were they a union or a professional association? They determined the training for stonemasons as well as ran campaigns for lower hours.

Workplace insurance and improved pay and conditions are the bedrock to the union offer. This remains the key purpose of unions: to protect workers and improve their pay and conditions. Aligned to this is the real and important offer of unions around workplace safety.

**Suggestion: unions continue to evolve into organisations that broaden beyond industrial.**

But isn't the real purpose of unions to improve the lot of members? Unions simply enable people with common interests and purpose to associate. In some countries that involves unions being involved in creating cooperatives to purchase food essentials. When organising in new areas we need to understand in detail the potential member's interests and needs, issues and concerns and how we can help- not why they should accommodate what we offer.

If we find workers need more than our traditional offer, we need to meet this challenge. Our core industrial purpose will always be part of the offer. The final offer and approach however should not need to be so reliant on traditional workplace structures, organisers or cars, nor just bargaining and

workplace representation. New models of organisation and packages of services are available and we must seize them.

Some bright spots in the union movement are worthy of closer examination. They are proof that there is still an appetite for unionism in Australia where there is close identification with worker's

**There are unions doing well – and there are lessons to be learned from them.**

identity and where valuable services are being provided. Where unions are successful, the improvement of wages, conditions and respect for the occupation of workers remain key. Unions which have been successful in recruiting and retaining members in a difficult environment - such as the Australian Education Union or Teachers Federation, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, The Police Association, The Electrical Trades' Union (ETU), The Plumbing Trades Employee's Union (PTEU) - identify closely with the occupations they represent and work to improve the standing of their workers, their wages and conditions and safety at work.

They also offer a range of services aligned to that core offer.

### Identity Matters

The lessons learnt from these unions and MEAA saw us establish standalone divisions, with the Pharmacy Division being first amongst them. What must not escape many workers is the lack of a union which they can readily identify as being theirs, with a myriad of acronyms and catch-all defining branding – if not coverage – in the movement. The collective nature of unions requires that members identify as a collective, and diversified unions run the risk of losing their collective identity. This matter goes beyond marketing, it goes to reflecting the identities of the workers we hope to represent, much as the aforementioned success stories do.

This can be achieved without major structural change. In our union we changed our governance structure to have sections or divisions based on our major areas, such as pharmacy, engineers and scientists. These sections set direction and monitor progress against plans. The operational implementation of the plans may involve staff who work across a number of divisions. No governance structure is perfect; it is the perception of the workers we are trying to organise that is most critical.

In addition to our change of name from APESMA to Professionals Australia (in focus groups potential members thought APESMA sounded like a respiratory disease), we also created brands including Professional Pharmacists Australia, Professional Scientists Australia. These have their own website, collateral, colours and so forth.

**Suggestion: Unions enable the workers being organised to have their own identity.**

The new website allowed for user 'memory' so that members would receive customised feeds and profession specific websites.

What we had thought would be the case from observing the ANMF, the AEU and others was borne to be correct: potential members found organisations in which they could 'locate' themselves and their profession to be more attractive. By itself however, this was not a solution. We had to continue to alter our offer to make it more attractive.

### Aligning service provision to membership

The size of our organisations allows us to add services and purchase products at a low per-member cost, be it insurances, accountancy or financial planning. However, we must be careful not to treat our members as a marketplace and must always ensure that services align with our core purpose and their needs. We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past and dilute our credibility with member offers which are sub-standard or do not align with our broader purpose. Much as health clubs do not offer cheap legal advice, we should avoid trying to build a membership services offer around obscure offers.

Of critical importance, any service must be of high quality and credibility. For example, Professionals Australia has aggregated over 700,000 members to deliver high quality, professionally run member savings through a Member Advantage <http://memberadvantage.com.au/>.

The movement should look to provide new services well, aligning our products and services to our core purpose and reflecting member wishes. The final package of services for a particular group of workers should be based on research.

**Suggestion: peak bodies to build some common new services.**

There are however a number of services which we should not wait for each union to develop. Where unions have already developed useful services, we should fast track access to other unions.

### Type of new services

Ultimately, we represent the interests of workers, whether pertaining to wages, safety, conditions, training or risks in the workplace. This provides a range of opportunities to offer products and services relating to employment and the workplace. Given we have a broad insurance offer, insurances – and particularly those that relate to the workplace – will be an important additional component of the offer. Legal services for workplace matters are also aligned with our core purpose. If we are working to advance the interests of workers, then we also may wish to examine how we help them advance in their career and this may include training and accreditation.

The Plumbing Trades Employees Union (PTEU) is one of the best examples of helping their members stay at the cutting edge of trade best practice. The Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre offers multiple free training opportunities to members which help them stay abreast of new technologies. This union is helping to change the perception of their trade and driving interest in plumbing careers. Also offered is mandatory training to access worksites, private Plumbing Insurance, and Income Protection and Trauma Insurance<sup>2425</sup>. The offer can be broadly defined as workplace and trades insurances, safety and training; and the voice for their trade. The ETU also now offers training, income protection, ambulance cover, legal advice and a range of financial services and support; a similar but nuanced offer<sup>2627</sup>. While the range of services and products offered by the PTEU and the ETU is diverse, each service satisfies a need among workers in these industries, providing protection and assistance to workers when most needed. As a result, membership to these unions will likely be viewed as particularly attractive and ‘worth the money’ to prospective members, especially when faced with the prospect of purchasing these services elsewhere at more expensive individual rates.

**Successful unions have a range of bespoke services.**

The ANMF offers professional indemnity insurance, continuing professional development, legal services and professional indemnity insurance. CPD is mandatory for registration and a credit is given by the union for their online courses<sup>28</sup>. When accompanied with the ‘voice’ which this union gives their members, this is a compelling offer: the guild for their members; the union; and aligned member benefits.

Professionals Australia offers accreditation for engineers, which has driven growth amongst non-collective members in Queensland, where registration is mandatory, as well as CPD and professional

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<sup>24</sup> PICAC, ‘Training’, <http://picac.vic.edu.au/training-at-picac>

<sup>25</sup> Plumbing Trades Employees Union, ‘Member Insurance’, <http://www.pteu.asn.au/Members/Member-Insurance>

<sup>26</sup> ETU, ‘Extra Benefits’, <https://www.etu.vic.com.au/member-benefits/extra-benefits>

<sup>27</sup> ETU, ‘Training’, <https://www.etu.vic.com.au/your-union/training>; ‘Futuretech’, <https://www.etu.vic.com.au/your-union-training/futuretech>.

<sup>28</sup> Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Victorian Branch, ‘Membership Benefits’, <http://www.anmf.vic.asn.au/membership/anmf-vic-branch-membership-benefits>

indemnity insurance for Pharmacist members, which has seen a quantum leap in membership in that division<sup>29</sup>. These are tailored offers for different divisions of this union.

These membership offers are not necessarily portable to other unions, but the important thing to consider is that they are bespoke. In the case of the ANMF and PTEU it is accompanied with strong density and advocacy which they have worked hard to achieve in tandem, while Professionals Australia is investing to build that density and its voice.

### Membership Packages

The ACTU Secretary talks about the multiple membership packages his football club offers.

For most unions, one membership package is offered with discounts for part-time and lower paid members. This is similar to the manufacturer that offers multiple sizes but any colour so long as it's black!

It may be that many unions are best to focus on their core business of workplace insurance and negotiations. In that case, they must ensure – as we must with all services we provide – that it is done well and at a value point which encourages and does not act as a barrier to recruitment and retention. Increasingly people are making informed value judgements with information from a wide range of sources: that means that membership has to demonstrate value.

Fees do not vary greatly between unions, even though some unions offer additional services. Each union would need to determine what is in the package and what price, ideally driven by detailed research of those who are targets for membership, as well as existing members.

Whether a smaller fee could be charged for workers who are not in collective areas, in return for access to centralised workplace advice and support is worthy of examination.

The potential of membership packages can be seen by the number of members who join unions, but are not covered by a collective agreement. In Professionals Australia, 49% of our members join even though their union does not directly negotiate their wages and conditions. These members join for our package of services.

It is essential unions find a way to do this without cannibalising their existing members. At Professionals Australia we have the difficulty that these 'package' members are already paying full fees and represent nearly half our members. Therefore, the introduction of lower cost packages could dramatically reduce our income, a risk many other unions would not face as most of their members would be covered by collective agreements. For other unions who have few members in workplaces where there is not a collective agreement, a clear line could be drawn to minimise the risk of reducing income. For example, the packages could make clear that if a member is employed in a workplace where there is a collective, they must be a full paying member.

There are other options to mitigate the risks. We could offer these packages in new areas only, where few existing members are impacted or limit the offer to new members.

Successful implementation may enable the union to offer a lower fee membership, for example \$400 (\$300 after-tax) for a limited package of services. The package would not include collective bargaining and the extent of individual workplace advice and support would need to be clearly defined.

**Suggestion: unions consider introducing new membership packages.**

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<sup>29</sup> Professional Pharmacists Australia, 'About', <http://www.professionalsaustralia.org.au/pharmacists/about/>



### Centralised membership

Recently, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions introduced 'Together', a low-cost membership for "just about anyone who's employed in a workplace that doesn't have a union", and offers "advice on your rights, tips on dealing with your employer or support to negotiate your pay and conditions"<sup>30</sup>.

Naturally unions will be concerned about any initiatives reducing the likelihood of members ultimately joining their own organisation. Whether we can start offering a central form of package membership requires much thinking and further debate.

As a huge list of supporters is developed, we need practical ways to utilise this group as leads to union membership. Some aspects of a package could be offered to supporters as a process of transitioning them to other membership. The transition from supporter to low-cost membership represents rungs on the ladder of engagement towards full union membership.

There will be much resistance to these types of suggestions, and we should not let them distract from a much-needed wider debate on what individual unions can do.

There is one area we must find a sensible solution as a movement- the logic of members being able to move jobs without re-joining remains a compelling challenge that we have failed to address.

**Suggestion: identify a practical solution to enable members to move jobs without re-joining.**

### Dealing with individuals

The orthodox view we have always held is that the costs of servicing individuals is high and that it is a lower cost to represent hundreds of members in collective bargaining.

To our great surprise we did the maths in Professionals Australia and found the exact opposite. We spend around 72% of our resources on our 51% of members in collective areas. That is, our members who work in workplaces where there is not a collective agreement cross-subsidise our members in collective areas.

We were further surprised when the analysis identified the real costs of having a field staff on the road was very expensive compared to the efficiency with which we dealt with individual cases through our Workplace Advice and Support Centre (WAS). This centre is staffed by lawyers and some senior industrial officers and deals with individual workplace advice and support issues including employment contract reviews, unfair dismissals and grievances.

The Centre has been operating for over 6 years and now clears 94% of cases without the need to refer the matter back to the state office. Last year almost 2000 cases were handled, equating to approximately 10% of our membership.

If we were to organise in growing parts of the economy where we have few members and bargaining is an unlikely process at least for the first years, we will need to have efficient capacity to deal with bullying, sexual harassment, underpayments and other issues. This could be done in an alliance with a law firm or through developing capacity within unions or in peak bodies.

**Suggestion: individual unions and peak bodies consider the potential to further centralise servicing.**

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<sup>30</sup> Together, <http://www.together.org.nz/>

### Freeing up resources

The union movement needs to free up resources to enable the delivery of new services and to enable an investment into new areas. We need to operate more efficiently.

There are three areas that could generate huge resource savings.

#### 1. Development and delivery of new services

As many of the services provided by the union movement are similar, a group of unions could get together to deliver those services more effectively and efficiently.

For example, instead of each union setting up a law firm, a group of unions could do so. Instead of each union developing a financial planning offer, a group of unions could share the development costs. Instead of each union developing a career package, a group of unions could share the development costs and for example, offer a centralised resume review.

These arrangements do not require structural change. Unions may choose to formalise their cooperation through companies of which they are all shareholders or through amalgamations. We are not suggesting a structural debate, which has every chance of being a distraction. Alternatively, unions may agree for their peak bodies to undertake some or the bulk of this work.

What is critical is that resources are freed and the services are of exceptional quality. To do this often requires different staff with unique skills.

**Suggestion: unions combine to develop and implement new packages of services.**

#### 2. Collective buying power

Most unions have phone contracts, purchase stationery, purchase or lease vehicles, pay fees to banks, licence software, purchase computers, utilise carparks, rent hotels and vehicles, utilise graphic designers and researchers. And we do all of this as separate organisations.

Enormous sums could be saved by centralising the procurement of these services, and it is a role which the ACTU should closely examine taking up. Alternatively, unions could work collaboratively to establish joint procurement facilities, negotiating deals on behalf of unions and potentially honourees and members- collective bargaining!

**Suggestion: peak bodies allocate staff to facilitate the collective purchase of a range of services and products.**

#### 3. Back-end operational efficiency

Unions spend a considerable proportion of their income on back-end operation including membership processing, accounts and finance and ICT services. We estimate from our own experience and anecdotal information from other unions that this represents 20% of all expenditure. Huge savings are possible through a more efficient delivery of these operational services. The services are essential for the union to function, but it is not essential that each branch or union obtain the services in-house.

There are a range of options that could potentially save significant money and improve the level of service. Within a union there would be large savings by simply centralising membership processing, let alone the potentially of an inbound and outbound call centre. Professionals Australia has centralised all membership processing and accounts. There are no administrative staff in most states. This has freed up resources for investment in organising. We also have a central outbound call centre,

**Suggestion: unions consider combined efforts to reduce backend costs.**

which speaks to around 60 per cent of our members each year, follows up on financial members and support state offices in bargaining campaigns. As previously mentioned, our workplace advice and support services are centralised.

Either a group of unions could combine to have some services delivered through an external body or through a company each union owns. For example, membership processing and financial services could be done on behalf of a number of like-minded unions. The services should not rely on relationships alone however, as the operation would need clear service contracts and formal organisational structure (for example, unions could be shareholders in the organisation delivering the services).

Assuming 20% of expenditure is back-end operational, if the union movement could reduce that cost by five percentage points to 15%, it is estimated the movement would free up **\$51 million**.

### Industrial rights

Our levers to improve the situation of workers under the current industrial laws are limited, with the bargaining system a dismal failure for workers in many largely non-union areas.

Increasingly the digital revolution will see the contract workforce grow significantly. It is essential that industrial regulation should cover workers rather than employees.

Professionals Australia took on the challenge of organising translators and interpreters. The vast bulk of these professionals, who perform a critical community service in areas such as our hospitals, courts and education settings, are predominantly contractors who supply their services via four or five agencies who tender for government work.

With no award that applies and one pool of labour supplied via multiple agencies that win tenders by cutting costs, sees these highly skilled professionals regularly earning less than the minimum wage.

To address the situation Professionals Australia needed to make a case that there was great risk to access and equity and to government of not addressing this failed labour market. To practically address these issues we needed to be able to represent the contractors. Only by seeking an exemption from the ACCC, were we able to facilitate a collective voice for these disempowered professionals. We have also sought to achieve change through procurement policy and new funding.

The system is struggling to keep up with the rapidly changing labour force.

The union movement has no difficulties listing the legislative changes we need to address the situation. We then advocate for these changes and attempt to negotiate with government. We suspect we will have at least as much success by focusing on the situation of workers in areas with low union membership. We can highlight to politicians and community that their situation must be improved and that we need the ability to create a fair minimum. Bargaining alone will not be effective - we need a functioning award system backed by conciliation and arbitration. We must be able to achieve sector or industry outcomes that take wages out of competition. We must have better regulation for contractors and enable tribunals to address unfair contracts.

We cannot rely solely on the election of Labor governments to deliver for our members. The movement must be robust enough to successfully advocate the rights of workers regardless of the political fortunes of the party we founded, and for that, we need the credibility and power that weight of membership lends the cause.

**Suggestion: the situation for workers in non-union sectors highlights the need to seek new industrial regulation.**

We have demonstrated the ability to move community opinion through campaigns which focus on workers. Previous regulation arose out of cataclysmic events, such as occurred in the 1890s. Given the level of change workers are facing, by highlighting the situation of workers in non-union areas, an overwhelming case for change can be build.

### Free Riders

There is a significant problem of free riding, where workers benefit from the work of unions, without the need to contribute. We need to seriously assess the recent proposal by University of Sydney Emeritus Professor Ron McCallum, that “..labour law should enable trade unions, if they choose, to bargain with employers and conclude collective agreements which only cover their members in the relevant workplace”<sup>31</sup>.

Unions have always argued that agreements and awards should apply to all workers covered, to ensure employers cannot employ non-members who can undercut union wages and conditions. This risk remains, but the free rider problem is crippling, and we see little chance of successfully arguing for service fees as this will draw the usual arguments about compelling people to pay. The argument for union only agreements is much easier to make, as the narrative fits closer to the current hegemony – that you don’t get what you don’t pay for.

**Suggestion: we should debate union agreements, which only apply to union members.**

Union also care about outcomes for all workers. It is essential awards apply to all workers. There remains a risk in enterprise agreements, as employers could offer individual contracts, which cut certain conditions. We would need to back ourselves to cover off the risk-that we can organise to avoid undercutting.

### Global Effort

Given the inevitable expansion of globalisation, it is essential unions develop an effective capacity to organise and campaign internationally against multinational corporations, utilising strategic campaigning techniques. This requires effective global union federations (GUFs), capable of coordinating campaigns across an industry in a targeted area. It’s not good enough for global union federations plans to resemble the agenda for the next international meeting.

Supply chain organising will become critical to long-term success. International agreements are required to ensure multinational companies respect workers and the right to organise in all countries.

We must utilise our strength that’s remaining in the world, in areas such as Europe, and utilise the potential of huge superannuation investment pools to drive sustainable investment through making the clear case that respect of international conventions is a wise investment. Consumers and government need to understand the behaviour of some multinationals.

**Suggestion: develop effective capacity to organise and campaign internationally.**

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<sup>31</sup> Ron McCallum AO, The 5<sup>th</sup> Ron McCallum Debate, Tuesday 6 October 2015, <http://www.aierights.com.au/2015/10/ron-mccallum-proposes-member-only-collective-agreements/>

### Industry strategy

Successful unions provide a voice for the workforce in each industry, and work with others to address industry issues. Members want their organisations and their industry to be successful. Members want to provide high-quality goods and services. Members want our country to be successful. Workers want unions to have a constructive relationship with the employers. It is important, where possible, we encourage the high road approach, which builds on notions of common purpose, even if the management of the company might not be particularly welcoming. Unions need to strategically target industries where they can build partnerships with employers around common purpose models. Positive success stories will help union image.

**Suggestion:  
continue to  
progress industry  
strategy.**

Unions must always work to highlight that the self-interested acts of a few do not always aggregate to the public interest or even ultimately interests of the industry.

Effective industry strategy requires a deep understanding of the industry and its power structures. A multifaceted or comprehensive campaign can then be structured which can improve the industry and the situation for workers in the industry. This style of campaigning requires skilled campaign directors and a strategic research capacity. It offers the opportunity for 'wholesale' membership growth.

Unions should select industries where we have the greatest opportunity to make a difference for the least resources allocation. Institutional barriers must not get in the way of sensible strategy. Modern approaches may be needed, including the pooling of investment resources to trial new membership models. These campaigns could be built around the identity and brand workers most relate to, with novel arrangements reached between relevant unions in the sector. Joint campaigns are opportunities to experiment and collaborate. In addition to industry campaigns, regional efforts are possible around issues such as penalty rates. These issues provide us an opportunity to connect with people otherwise disconnected from unions and will help us build our supporter base. These campaigning should not be limited to elections, and supporters should not be utilised only at elections.

### Skills

It is necessary to recognise that those who are engaged in social change or desire social change no longer see the area of employment advocacy or trade unions as being their logical employment home.

Unions have a lot to learn from these other social and environmental movements. We must regenerate a passion and conviction for something, which is seen to be inherently right. We must challenge the language and attitude where human beings are treated like any other resources or input. When did we let dismissals be described as "letting people go" or worse still creating "opportunities for people to re-envisage their future". Work is essential to a fair and just society. It is also essential to a stronger economy.

**Suggestion: rebuild  
our capacity to  
develop skills and  
support change.**

We must rebuild our capacity to develop and support our union staff and the thousands of honorary workplace representatives. Skills must be developed in areas necessary for modern unions to implement innovative strategy. Organising and industrial skills are essential but no longer sufficient. Much education must be delivered online.

The change process needs to be supported by an effective ACTU Organising Centre. Leaders need to get together to be challenged, encouraged and supported. It is over seven years since that has occurred.

### Image

We have suffered 'brand' damage although we still enjoy a positive base of support. Following the 'great recession' of the late 2000s, the approval of Labor Unions in the US continues to recover, and research previously conducted in Australia demonstrates that the number of Australians that approve of unions far outweighs the membership. 62 per cent of the populous view unions as important and 45% think workers would be better off if unions were stronger, just 26 per cent worse off<sup>3233</sup>. The challenge remains for unions to provide an offer that compels workers to sign up as financial members.

A positive image of unions overall and of unions in particular sectors will improve our chances of recruitment. Interestingly, many successful unions don't have unions in their title.

The best way to revive and strengthen our image is to demonstrate we care about workers. Our efforts to go into areas that we currently avoid will signal to the community that workers need unions and that unions care about workers.

Our campaigning tactics should highlight the situation in industries and bring to life the behaviour of some employers and the impact on individual employees. Our best marketing campaign will be free- real workers, real stories and a community desire for fairness. While laws help, the court of public opinion is always the best driver of change.

Similar to industry funds, unions should continue to identify effective branding. The recent success in the Swedish union, Unionen, warrants investigation. Unionen is the largest union in Sweden, representing largely white-collar workers. Unionen recently ran an impressive campaigning resulting in 100,000 new members, from a base of 500,000 members. The campaign had many components which involved all levels of the union, including workplace representatives. Underpinning the campaign was a sophisticated TV advertising campaign. One of the key ads features ordinary people in superhero costumes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62FgXlqOqvA>

The tag line: Gain power out of the ordinary at work: Unionen

Significant research underpinned the campaign. In describing the success of this campaign Unionen cautions there is a difference between recruiting members and organising members.

**Suggestion:  
improve the image  
of unions by  
reaching out to  
workers in the non-  
union sectors.**

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<sup>32</sup> Essential Report, 'Importance of unions', <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/importance-of-unions-6>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 'Better or worse off with stronger unions', <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/better-or-worse-off-with-stronger-unions-4>,

### Conclusion

If we accept now that change is needed, then we must work together to find a way to grow, and through that growth, improve the lives of working Australians. Fundamentally, it is our members and potential members that must drive the change in our movement: we should ask them what they want and adapt so that we can deliver it to them as best we can. This is the way to survive and grow as a movement. To meet the challenges of the future, we must reduce barriers to entry, improve services and meet the expectations of the modern workers by providing different models and tailored options for membership.

### The change process

In this section, we describe an approach to achieving the change needed.

While the collapse in union membership in Australia is alarming, we will not succeed by abandoning loyal members. To fundamentally alter what we deliver our loyal base would serve to dishonour their commitment. Lessons from Australia and overseas are that organisations that are successful stay true to their purpose and to their unique reason for existing.

Unlike many other organisations, our purpose, as discussed herein, has always been clear. What has changed is that the traditional offer has become less attractive and membership and civic engagement has become less the norm in modern society. There are unions which are growing, as outlined earlier, building on the unique position that they hold in Australian society and providing aligned services. These unions have leveraged their 'uniqueness'<sup>34</sup>. As we represent workers, what could be better aligned than journey insurance, career support, market rate information, continued training or accreditation?

We can all identify services that unions have offered which served to dilute that unique offer. Most often these services compete against dedicated, robust offers managed by large corporates with resources that far outweigh those of the union movement.

We need an effective process to confront these realities and align our unions to be able to successfully meet these challenges.

### The steps

Some years ago, Professionals Australia confronted an ugly truth at what was then known as APESMA. Our membership was ageing and facing the retirement precipice, our members were being retrenched in some industries due to restructure, and we were struggling to recruit and retain the Y generation.

The process of how we undertook change to attempt to meet these challenges was iterative and so is not accurately reflected in the process outlined below. This is the process that we would have undertaken if we were to commence it now, informed by extensive research and communication with other unions.

1. Give staff and honourees permission and encouragement to think differently, to innovate and to be wrong.
2. Conduct **non-member and member research** on your brand and services.
3. Conduct an **audit of member services and your offer** for attractiveness, effectiveness and alignment to core purpose.
4. **Decide on areas and avenues for growth** and calibrate your offer and services.
5. **Examine your membership model** for cost and tiered engagement. Check your offer again with research.
6. **Develop a new package** unique to each potential member group. Hire the staff skills to develop and manage those new services.
7. **Harness technology**. Invest in people who can analyse data (not simply manage it), create engaging content, organise online and develop new tools (or apply old ones in new ways).
8. Using **modern tactics** such as social media, engagement in campaigns through petitions, e-mails and fundraising, construct a tiered engagement which leads to the 'ask' to join. Use this engagement to add strength to your advocacy and build credibility.
9. **Revisit and refine**. Aim to regularly repeat the conduct of this process.

We detail some of these steps below.

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<sup>34</sup> Sheri Jacobs, 'The Art of Membership', Josey Bass, San Francisco, 2014, pp49-53.



### Research

The union movement has no shortage of research available to tell us what the Australian public think of us. We know that the overwhelming majority think that unions remain important to working people, with the trend an improving one<sup>35</sup>. Almost half think that unions have been a good influence for working people, nearly three times the amount that think they have been a negative influence<sup>36</sup>. With inherent strengths and a history of achievement, the foundations for the movement are strong. What is not readily available is research on the barriers to Australians joining, and what package and price point would encourage them to join.

Ultimately each union needs this research for a particular sector, but all unions could benefit from central research and the collation of research done by each union.

More potential member research needs to be performed by the ACTU to determine the major barriers to membership, what – in a holistic sense – potential members are looking for from unions and what might encourage them to join.

A series of research was required at Professionals Australia to facilitate a clear solution. This research is ongoing, with every new service tested.

**Suggestion: ACTU auspice member research for affiliates on barriers to membership, the desired package of services and price points which would attract potential members to join.**

### Re-casting the membership model

While many of us accept we need to change, there is comfort in the status quo. Member satisfaction surveys keep showing our members appreciate our services. The binary nature of our membership offer means that members who are unhappy, or less reliant on the union, have no option but to resign, rather than scale back their level of commitment. Membership goes down, satisfaction increases and there is little internal pressure for change, as those that remain have become more integral to the future of the union.

There is no way for workers to experience the benefits of being a member by way of trial, lesser engagement or receiving communications materials. This is unlike the practice of many membership organisations, where there is a ladder of engagement prior to the final ‘ask’ of membership.

Engagement with a union via social media, signing a petition or taking other campaign actions is often termed ‘permission marketing’. By giving this permission, consumers want to receive discounts, show support for the brand to others, stay informed about the activities of the company, and gain access to exclusive content<sup>37</sup>. Taking these lessons to a membership setting, it gives you the ability to contact members to inform them about your activities that affect their work and services you offer that might be of interest. This limited experience of the union could be expanded so that they experience a limited version of membership. They may receive electronic newsletters, be engaged in campaigns or have website access for a period. Free trials and/or ‘freemium’ membership has become the norm across membership organisations: members either have unlimited access for a set period or they have ongoing access to a limited service for free, or at nominal cost<sup>38</sup>. The use of freemium services should ultimately provide some pipeline towards the development of a larger membership, by building awareness, demonstrating value and enlarging the community of potential members.

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<sup>35</sup> Essential Report, ‘Importance of unions’, <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/importance-of-unions-5>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, ‘Unions in Australia’, <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/unions-in-australia>

<sup>37</sup> Sexton, ‘ReMEMBERSHIP’, p70.

<sup>38</sup> Robbie Kellman Baxter, ‘The Membership Economy’, McGraw-Hill Education, USA, p82-85.

Joining a membership organisation is more than transactional: it carries emotion and grants access to services that others don't receive. That's what makes service so important, because membership is about people. Unions only exist for and due to, their members. Indeed most unions will state that they exist to 'serve our members', but this commitment must be demonstrated through action. Members have a right to expect regular contact, high quality communications and services<sup>39</sup>. For many in the movement, this is anathema. They view our purpose is inherently political, leveraging campaigns to attempt to grow. Surely there is a place for both approaches in the one organisation? We can work on the micro level to improve lives through member services; and work at macro level to improve their lives by changing the political, social and industry environment they operate in.

To improve people's lives at a micro level, the service you provide is key, and first and foremost among those services will always be the key role that unions play in protecting and improving the working lives of Australians. If we accept however that this is a service that many are unwilling to pay for by itself and opt to produce aligned services, we need ensure that:

- The cluster of services provided are of a high standard;
- That we continually review them, innovate, cull and refine based on research and data;
- Base our services around our unique point of difference and build on and extend successful services<sup>40</sup>.

When a potential member gives us permission to communicate with them, in whatever form that may occur, then they need to be able to immediately access whatever you are offering<sup>41</sup>. If you offer limited access to publications as part of 'freemium' membership, then they want that access immediately. To not grant it would make the union look unprofessional when compared with other organisations. The same can be applied to other forms of engagement.

If potential members ask to connect with a union or a union leader through social media, they do not expect to have to wait a week. Appropriate resources and capabilities must be in place to support successful orientation of potential members, or they will immediately lose interest. The first

**Many membership organisations now offer a free trial by way of introduction, or at least limited access to services.**

few months are critical to your long-term relationship with the new member. Tactics include a process of orientation, customised communications and of course, the delivery of quality, highly valued services in the first 90 days. A survey of new members should be conducted regularly to check whether your orientation process is up to standard<sup>42</sup>.

With member density declining, and becoming more fractured across workplaces and types of work, the movement must look closely at better methods of engagement, including onboarding. The days of the welcome from the organiser or shop steward are sadly a thing of the past for many workers. This is an area at Professionals Australia we have much work to do: while we ensure we have contact in the first 90 days, we do not measure it, customise communications or get to know new members near well enough. Engagement with new members is critical early in the relationship and that means meeting staff or other members, participating in a service, survey, communications or social media, or all or more of these<sup>43</sup>.

The second tranche of research we conducted showed that our offer was attractive. We were ready to launch the new services as part of our offer. A 90 day money back guarantee if members are not

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<sup>39</sup> ASAE, '7 Measures of Success', p 12 -16.

<sup>40</sup> Sheri Jacobs, The Art of Membership, pp57-59.

<sup>41</sup> Kellman Baxter, The Membership Economy, p102.

<sup>42</sup> Sheri Jacobs, The Art of Membership, pp222-229.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

satisfied is now provided. We still have work to do on the cost of membership packages. In the next section we deal with this in more detail.

### Harnessing technology

In order to properly utilise the advantages of new technologies, we need specialist organising skills. Data is an important strategic asset for unions (as it is for business or any other government), and not just for reruns of old campaigns.

**New technologies require new and different skill sets, not organisers who use Facebook.**

We need to invest in people who can analyse data (not simply manage it), who can create engaging content, and develop new tools (or apply old ones in new ways). Broadly speaking there are three overlapping skills required when it comes to data: database management, data analysis, web analytics. Some unions might have the first, but not the others. The movement needs to value these data skills as much as it does organisers' 1:1 conversation skills. These skills overlap and complement social media and campaign

skills.

This is a specialist skill set which requires people who have experience and training. The growth in this professional stream has seen a boom in the number of people undertaking training and seeking employment: it is a competitive environment and unions should be seeking to recruit the best in the field.

### Build a ladder of engagement

While the world of free networking brings challenges for membership organisations, it also brings opportunities, which if harnessed can deliver growth for unions at a much lower cost than the traditional organising model.

As stated previously, most of us continue to have a disproportionate number of staff dedicated to face-to-face organising. There will always be a place for these vital staff as the public face of the organisation and providing personalised contact with members. What social media presents us with is an opportunity to reach members and potential members more efficiently.

There are now 13 – 14 million Facebook users active each month in Australia. 50 per cent of those users watch a video via the medium and we spend an average of 1.7 hours on Facebook every day<sup>44</sup>. Importantly, Facebook is also used as an open-source and peer reviewed marketplace, “of those that have discovered new information on Facebook, 60% would go on to learn more and about 35% of people who have discovered a business or product on Facebook would share that with their friends”. Additionally, LinkedIn has 3.6 million users and Twitter 2.7 million<sup>46</sup>.

**Digital tools can make organising more efficient.**

It is now commonplace to expect that the things you want to know you can find out, on demand, by looking online. This is as true in our social lives as it is in our working lives; as true in our patterns of consumption of commodities as it is in our consumption of news and media content. People still want to shop, read the news, contact their friends, send professional correspondence and find out what's happening around them – it's just that now they can do it very quickly, very easily and for free on their phones.

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<sup>44</sup> David Cowling, 'Social Media Statistics Australia – June 2015', Social Media News .com.au, <http://www.socialmedianews.com.au/social-media-statistics-australia-june-2015/>, last accessed 30 November 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Alex Heber, 'These incredible stats show exactly how huge Facebook is in Australia, Business Insider Australia', <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/these-incredible-stats-show-exactly-how-huge-facebook-is-in-australia-2015-4>, last accessed 30 November 2015.

<sup>46</sup> David Cowling, Social Media Statistics Australia – June 2015.

The benefit of using digital tools in our organising is that we retain the power to come together, take action, and then disperse quickly, but without eating into increasingly valuable work or personal time. Digital tools also give members a way to involve their colleagues and friends in campaigns with a much lower barrier to access – forwarding a link or sharing a petition online is an easier first step to complete than having a face-to-face conversation.

Crowd-funding and the enlisting of supporters is also most easily done using an approach based around leveraging a social media presence.

NationBuilder, a CRM designed for activist-led organising and campaigning, has been used in the Pharmacy division to generate engagement online with employee pharmacists. It connects with social media so that our pages, and all our supporter profiles, are integrated in the database. Their interaction with our pages and our content are captured. Through NationBuilder and Facebook, we can quickly build online activities and broadcast them to supporters to complete when an issue is hot.

At the same time we are building profiles of our supporters – we can look at what we have asked people to do and see who has done it. As we capture contact info through online actions (a petition where you give your email address, or a pledge to support a cause where you give your phone number, etc.) we build a growing list of supporters and contacts that we can speak to.

The more info we collect about who our supporters are and what they are willing to do, the more effectively we can tailor our communications to drive them toward more meaningful actions, including joining as a member. We are also able to pick out activists that we can work with offline.

The more you diversify online, the more new supporters you will find and the easier it is to keep the supporters you have interested. Videos, infographics, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts can all be used to find an audience and drive potential supporters to a petition or pledge or forum, or whatever the next step in their ‘supporter journey’ might be.

In the Pharmacy division, having used this process steadily for around two years, we are now at a point where we can send a text message to 2000 non-member pharmacists on a public holiday to remind them that their penalty rates are under threat. When we did this recently, 48 people texted back asking to speak with someone about joining. We then have call-centre staff call them for the follow up conversation and sign-up, which amounts to a much more efficient and economical process.

### Leveraging social media

Activity in social media can lend unions weight. Having 6,600 supporters on Facebook lends Professional Pharmacists Australia heft and means that the media, government and our opponents pay much greater attention to us. This can be leveraged to demonstrate clout to potential members.

Social media and centralised support and communications can also form the basis of a mid –tier of membership, which we are looking to trial in growth areas. This would be a secondary tier of membership, which would acknowledge the fact that many of these members do not require the presence of an organiser, the most expensive component of the union service model. There would be a centralised service of specialist and a small team in a coordinating capacity centrally. Those who are members of the union in collective areas would continue to be required to pay full membership, in acknowledgment of the fact they derive the benefit of wage negotiations, while those ‘package’ members who want actual physical representation must pay the full fee.

Social media and campaigns, stepping up to fuller engagement can be the base level of engagement in a tiered approach.

### Conclusion

The change process will not be easy. Unions should not undertake the process for the sake of protecting the 'institution'. The change process is necessary because unions are simply workers who get together and support each other for a better life. Unions are workers. Workers are people who have families and aspirations. They want respect, recognition and reward. Together workers create a society we all want to live. Without unions we will go backwards. We will not let that happen.

### Case Study: Professionals Australia

A case study on Professionals Australia is available.