

Trends and Practices in Australian Association Publishing.

The Fourth Annual Member Communications Survey

Full Report, March 2015

Mahlab
MEDIA



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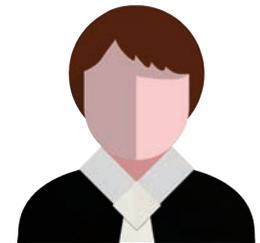
Who conducted the survey?

Overview.



Australian associations are embracing a multi-faceted approach to communicating with their members, with the adoption rates of major content channels and platforms increasing across the board.

While this increase is most certainly a win for Australian associations, the results show that it is putting pressure on internal resources, with more than half of those surveyed citing lack of staff as their top communications challenge. Not only this, but the challenges of creating compelling and engaging content, as well as reinvigorating disengaged members, are also of great concern to associations.



Encouragingly, the percentage of associations addressing the often-difficult task of measuring return on investment has lifted. While 44 per cent of those surveyed in 2013 cited measuring ROI as a major challenge, just 32 per cent did so in 2014.

What are the results telling us?

The insights you need to know.

Australian associations have **adopted a greater number of content platforms and channels**

with which to communicate with their members. The biggest area of growth has been in the use of social media platforms (from 74 per cent in 2013 to 87 per cent in 2014).

While this increase indicates that associations are recognising the importance of embracing a multi-faceted approach to member engagement, it is putting pressure on internal resources:

51 per cent of associations surveyed cite a lack of staff as their top communications challenge.

Additionally, this greater focus on increasing the number of channels and platforms used to connect with members is **failing to address the fundamental task of effectively engaging members.**

- The results show that 37 per cent of associations are grappling with the challenge of reinvigorating disengaged members.
- 40 per cent identify the creation of compelling and engaging content as a pressing issue.
- Most worrisome of all, nearly one quarter admit they do not use content to engage and recruit members.

Associations are progressively **tackling the challenge of measuring the effectiveness of their communications efforts.**

The percentage of those citing proving ROI as a major challenge has decreased, from 44 per cent in 2013 to 32 per cent in 2014.

While this is a significant improvement, only 21 per cent of associations surveyed believe they are effectively using technology, like marketing software and digital analytics, to measure the success of their content.

Associations need to place greater emphasis on educating their marketing and communications teams about how best to measure and analyse the performance of their content and, more to the point, prove the value of their efforts.

Associations are increasingly **unlocking their gated content.**

The percentage of those offering member-only content has almost halved since last year's survey – from 11 per cent to just 4 per cent.

By making their content readily available to the general public, **associations are creating opportunities to capture the attention of prospects and, ultimately, convert them into active and engaged members.**

What are associations publishing?

Email and social and video – oh my!

Email marketing experienced an 11 per cent surge in popularity this year,

making newsletters the number one communication channel for Australian associations, with website-hosted news updates coming in a close second (94 per cent and 90 per cent of respondents cite their use respectively).

Publishing activity across social media is up 13 per cent from last year,

making it the third most popular communication channel.

- Facebook is the most widely used social media channel among Australian associations, with 78 per cent of respondents maintaining an active account. Twitter trails on 72 per cent, LinkedIn comes in third with 61 per cent.

Video has experienced significant growth,

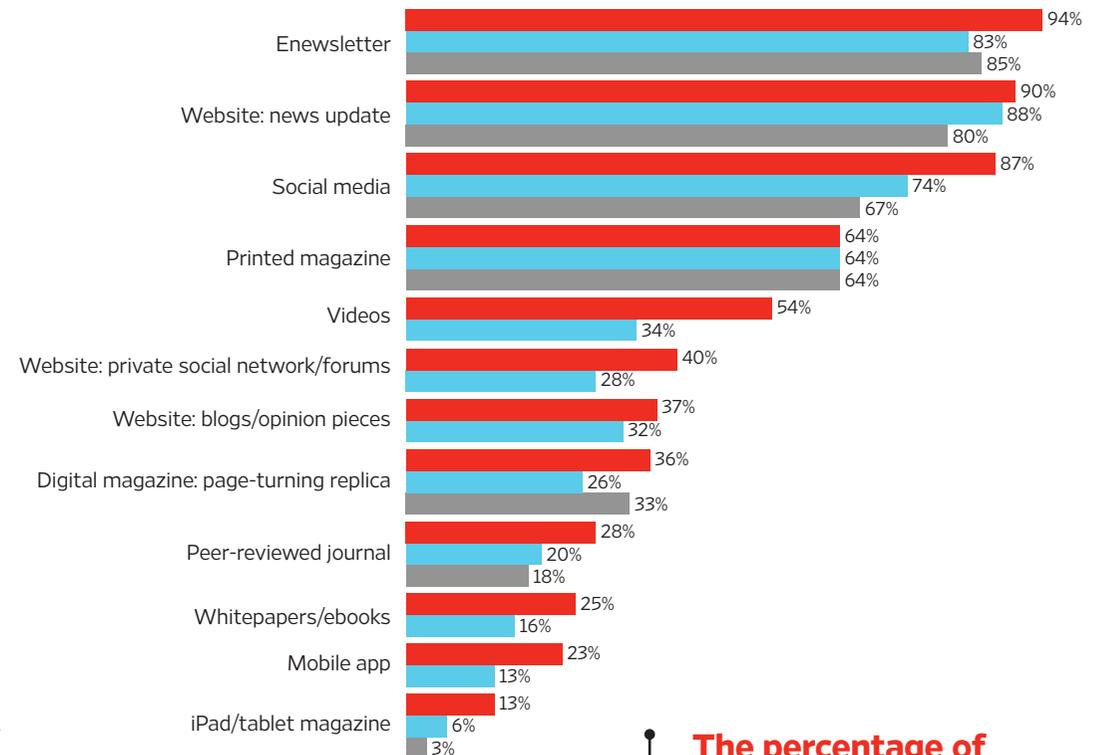
with the percentage of respondents producing video content increasing, from 34 per cent in 2013 to 54 per cent in 2014.

The percentage of associations producing print magazines remains unchanged,

sitting at 64 per cent for the third year running – a consistency symptomatic of the continued value of print as a means through which to connect with, and provide value to, members.

What type of communications are being produced by associations

2014 2013 2012



Future Publishing Plans.

Foresight is a wonderful thing.

Social media represents a key area of focus for Australian associations,

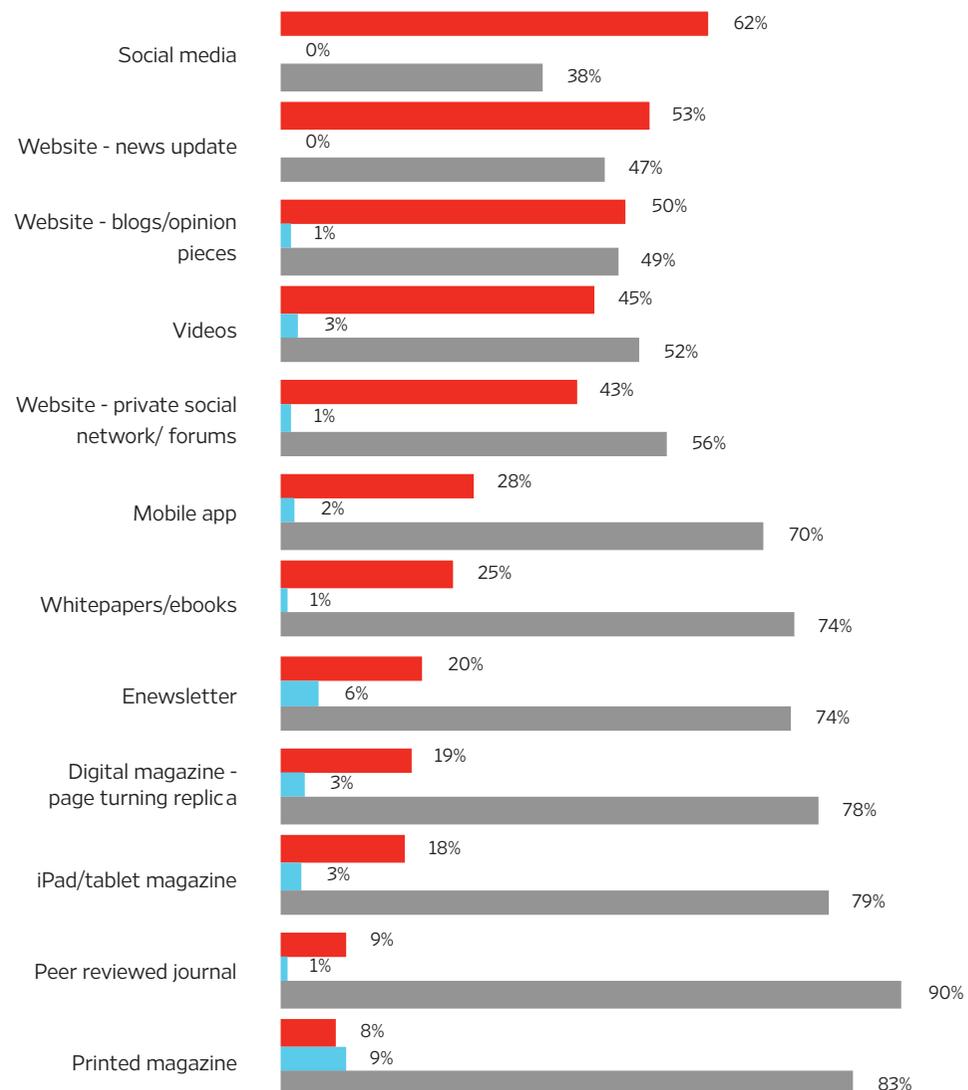
with 62 per cent planning to publish more across their respective social media channels in 2015

An overall sense of satisfaction is present in the findings,

with respondents planning to maintain their current publishing frequencies across nine of the surveyed 12 major platforms and channels. Having said this, respondents intend to boost activity across their respective social media channels and blogging platforms, as well as increase the frequency at which they provide website-hosted news updates.

Do you plan to publish more or less in the next 12 months?

More Less Same



Challenges.

What is (and isn't) keeping you up at night?

For the third consecutive year, Australian associations are citing lack of staff as their top challenge.

While the percentage of those challenged by a lack of staff has decreased 11 per cent in the past 12 months, a staggering 51 per cent are still battling against this resource deficit.

Two of the survey's top four challenges highlight just how difficult the task of member engagement can be,

with 40 per cent of respondents citing creating compelling and engaging content, and 37 per cent citing reinvigorating disengaged members as major communications hurdles respectively.

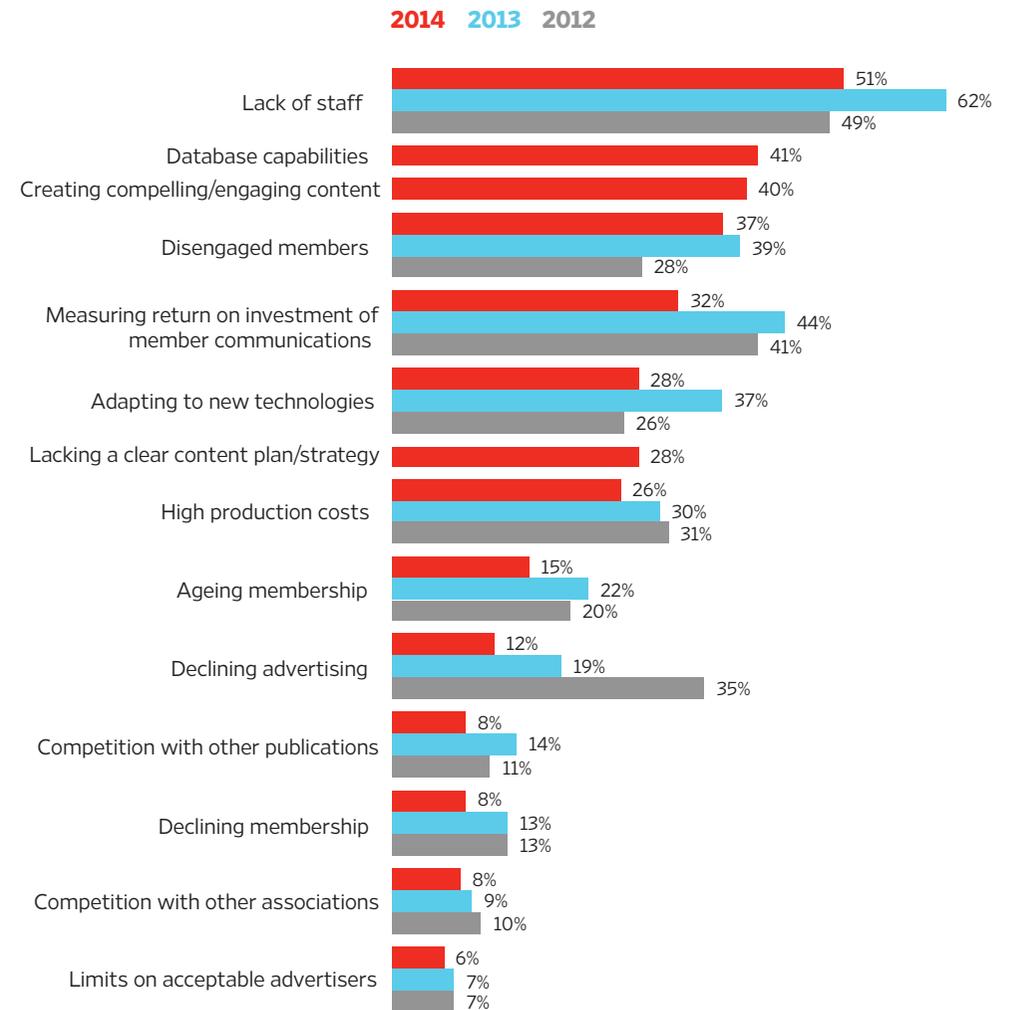
The percentage of Australian associations addressing the often-difficult task of measuring return on investment

has lifted. While 44 per cent of those surveyed in 2013 cited measuring ROI as a major challenge, just 32 per cent did so in 2014.

Declining advertising revenue has progressively become less of an issue for associations over the past three years.

While more than a third of respondents ranked it as a challenge in 2012, just 12 per cent do so in this survey.

What are your main member communications challenges?



Benefits.

What worked in the past won't work in the future.

The level of benefit that associations perceive their member communications strategies are delivering them is slipping steadily.

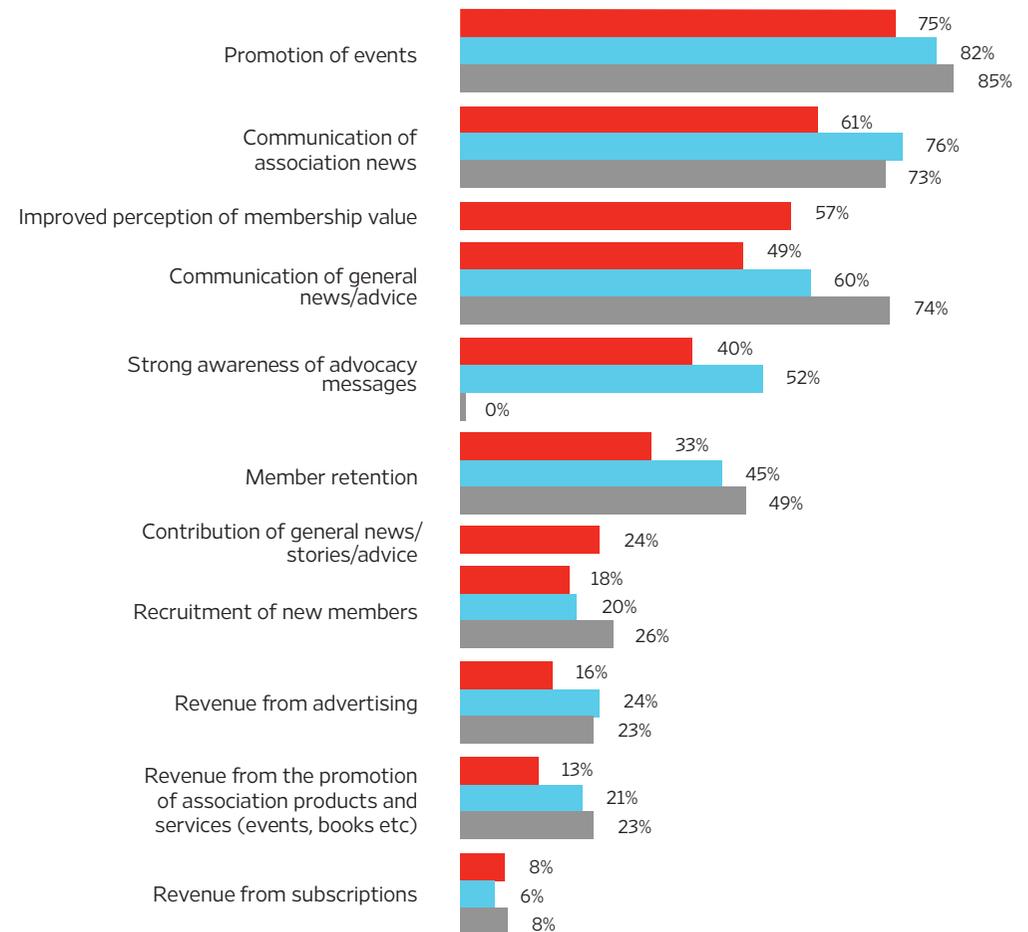
Take as an example this year's top benefit: the promotion of events. While this is its third year as the most valuable benefit of associations' communications programs, the percentage of respondents listing it as such has consistently decreased – from 85 per cent in 2012, to 82 per cent in 2013 and to 75 per cent in 2014.

This gradual decline in associations' perception of benefit is likely symptomatic of three things:

- The social web has shifted the communications paradigm on its head. Now members, not associations, are calling the shots, using their newly-acquired clout and command to shift the conversation from a one-way dialogue about products and services, to a two-way exchange centred on the notions of utility.
- Today's members are forcing associations to justify their value through proof of utility – how the organisation can assist its members in achieving their goals. If a member communications program's sole purpose is to blatantly promote the association's products and services, members simply will not engage with the organisation's content.
- The findings suggest many associations do not have a documented strategy with which to plan, develop, implement and monitor their marketing and communications efforts. By establishing a documented marketing and communications strategy that's tied to overarching business objectives, associations can execute campaigns that are both consistent and, more to the point, effective in calling members to a desired action.

What are the main benefits your association gets from its member communications?

2014 2013 2012



Reach and retention.

Open your doors, go forth and talk to your members!

Associations are increasingly unlocking their gated content.

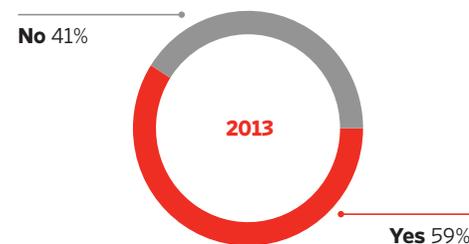
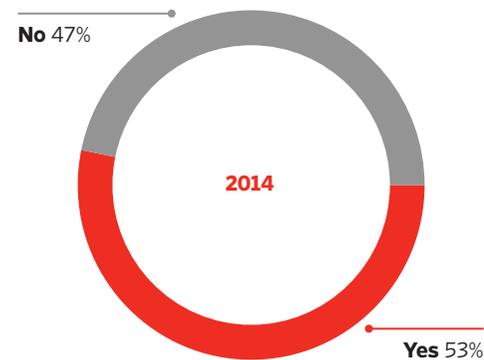
The percentage of those offering exclusively member-only content has almost halved since last year's survey from 11 per cent to just 4 per cent.

- It appears Australian associations are recognising that through making content readily available to the general public, they allow for greater opportunities to capture the attention of prospects and, ultimately, convert them into active and engaged members.

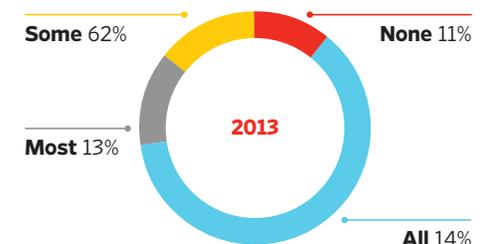
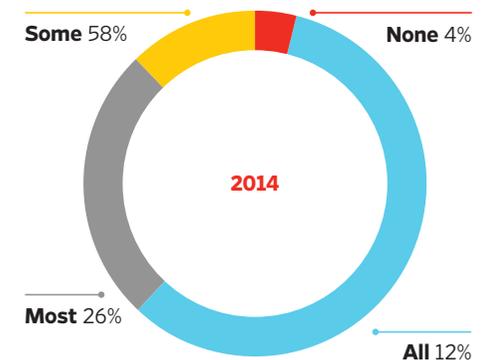
Nearly half of respondents admit they have not surveyed their members about the quality of their member communications programs in the past 12 months.

- When 40 per cent of respondents cite creating compelling and engaging content, and 37 per cent cite reinvigorating disengaged members as major communications hurdles respectively, the importance of maintaining an open, two-way communication loop between the association and its members cannot be stressed enough.

Have you surveyed your members about your communications in the last 12 months?



How much of your content do you allow non-members to read?



Database segmentation.

Slicing and dicing will make you enticing

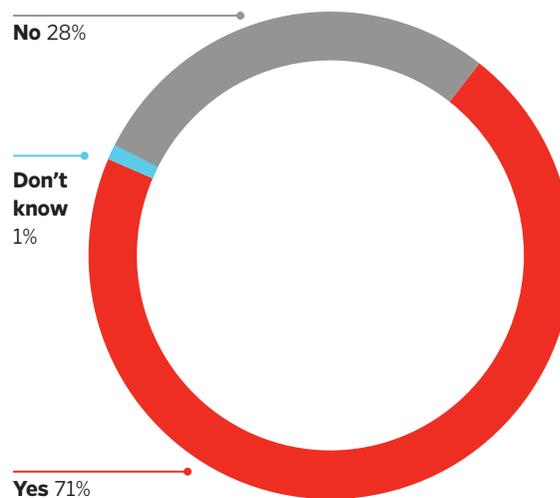
71 per cent of Australian associations segment their databases

to deliver more targeted content to their members.

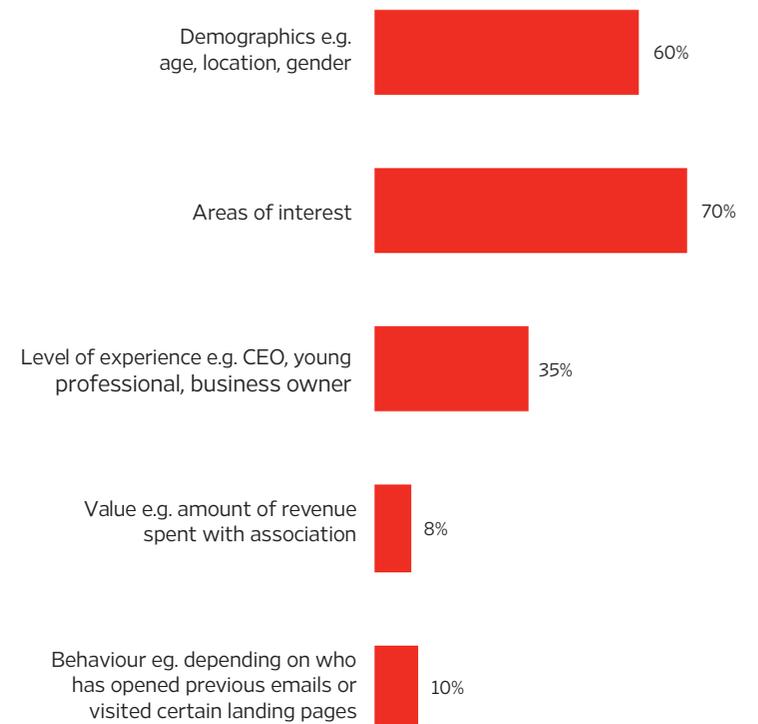
Hearteningly, 70 per cent of respondents segment based on areas of interest,

while 60 per cent choose to break up their membership using demographic details, 35 per cent based on the professional experience of each individual member (ie CEO, young professional, business owner etc).

Have you segmented your membership to allow for targeted communications?



What kind of segmentation do you do?



Paid advertising.

Raising revenue or redundant?

For 57 per cent of the associations surveyed,

advertising revenue isn't covering the costs associated with content production -

editorial, design and, in the case of print content, printing and distribution.

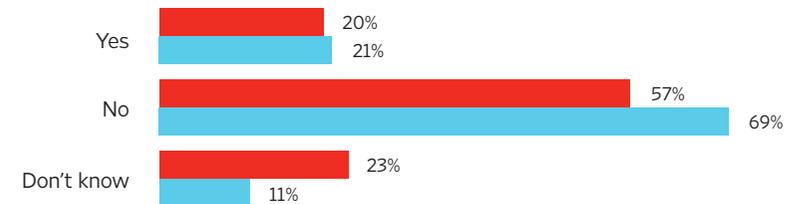
While print remains the preferred channel for paid advertising,

27 per cent of Australian associations recorded a fall in paid print advertising revenue

in the 2013-14 financial year.

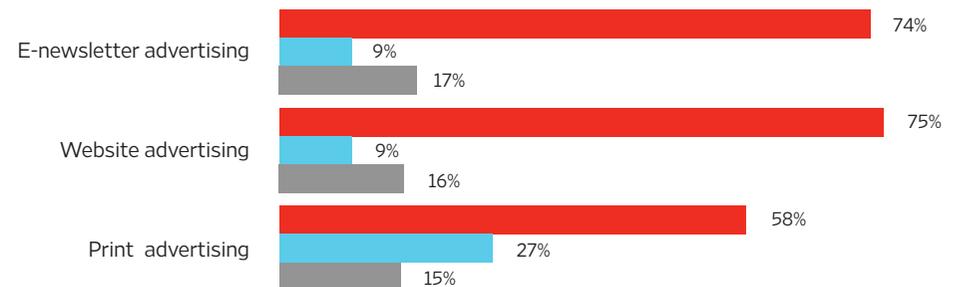
Does advertising cover the production costs (editorial, design, print, mail) of your member communications?

2014 2013



Has revenue from paid advertising across all your publications changed or stayed the same this financial year?

Same Decrease Increase

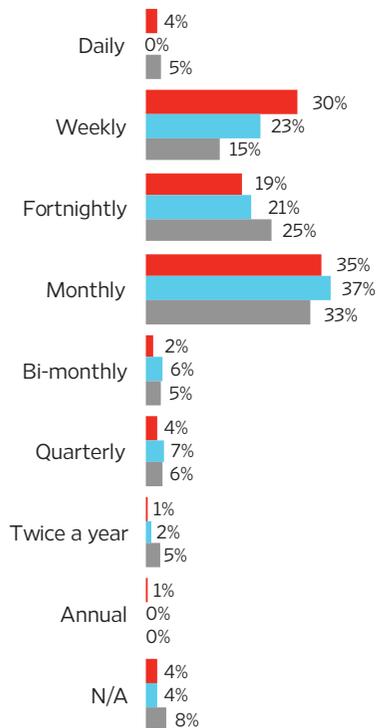


Trends in Frequency: Digital.

Enewsletters

Weekly newsletters are on the rise, with the number of associations sending out at this frequency increasing 30 per cent since 2013. Monthly remains the most popular frequency, with 35 per cent of respondents choosing to communicate with members in this way.

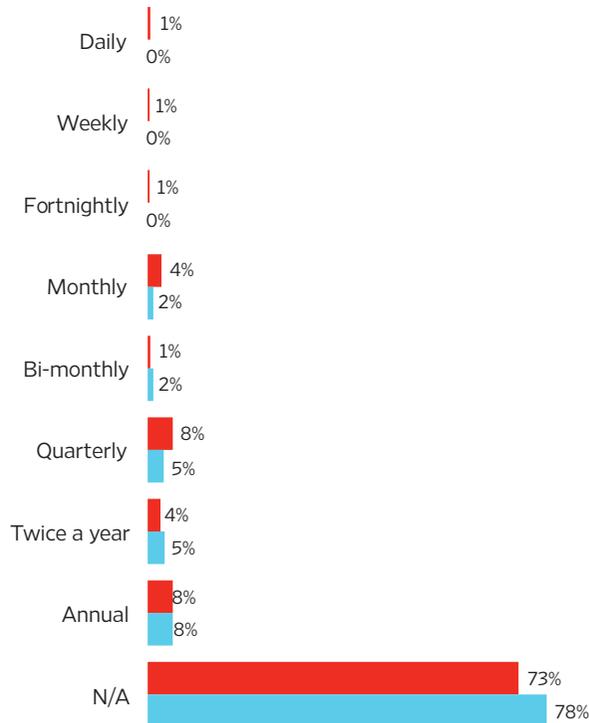
2014 2013 2012



Whitepaper/ebook

A vast majority of associations – 73 per cent – do not publish whitepapers and ebooks, although of those that do, quarterly and annual frequencies are preferred.

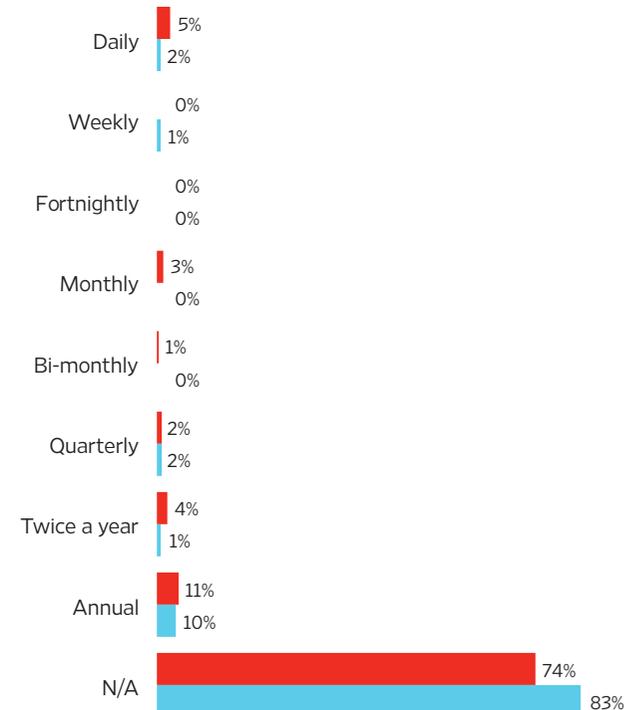
2014 2013 * 2012 data not available



Mobile app

While 74 per cent of respondents are yet to develop and launch a mobile app, 11 per cent say they use mobile applications on a once-a-year basis, suggesting this is a platform used most prominently at annual events like conventions and conferences.

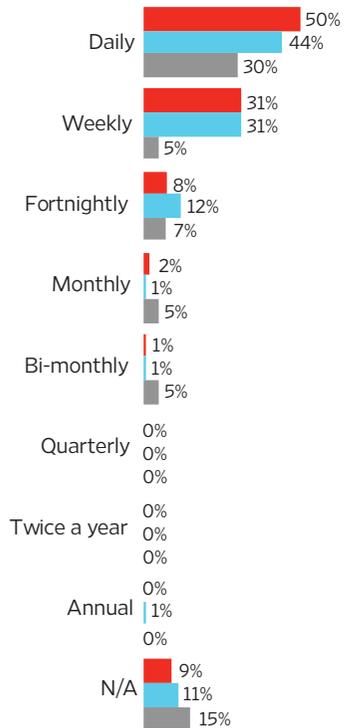
2014 2013 * 2012 data not available



Social media channels

One in two associations publish across their preferred social media channels on a daily basis, while 31 per cent post content weekly. The percentage of associations without a social media presence has declined steadily over the past few years – from 15 per cent in 2012, to 11 per cent in 2013, and to 9 per cent in 2014.

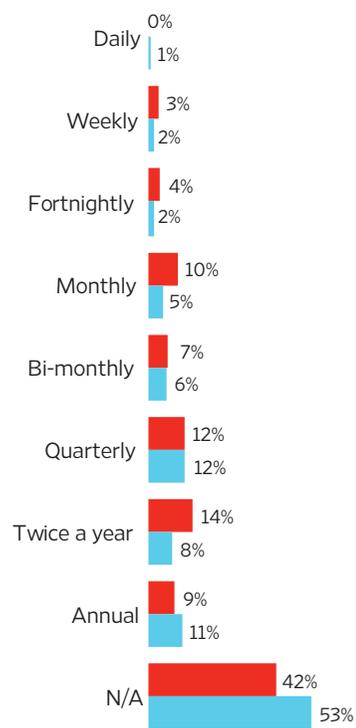
2014 2013 2012



Video

The percentage of associations publishing video content has increased 11 per cent since 2013, with the three most popular frequencies being biannually (14 per cent), quarterly (12 per cent) and monthly (10 per cent).

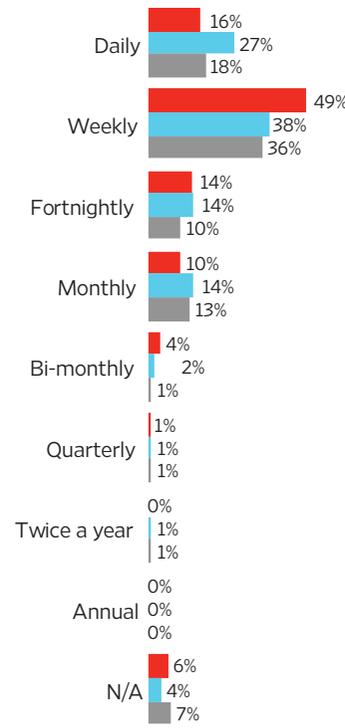
2014 2013 * 2012 data not available



Website-hosted news updates

While daily website-hosted news updates have dropped 11 per cent since 2013, weekly updates have skyrocketed from 38 per cent in 2013 to 49 per cent in 2014.

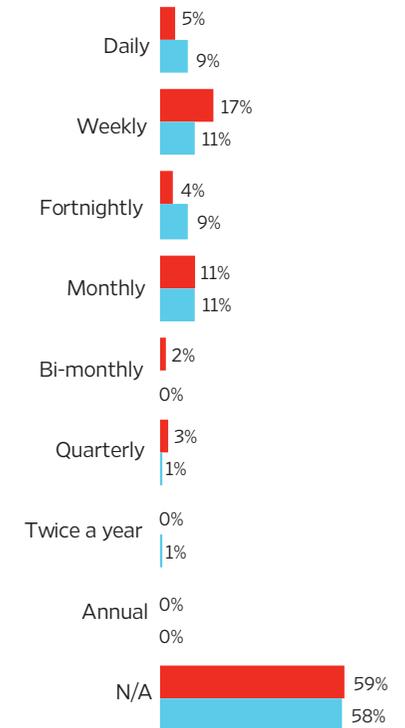
2014 2013 2012



Blog posts

Almost 60 per cent of associations don't have a blog but of those that do, weekly and monthly frequencies are preferred.

2014 2013 * 2012 data not available

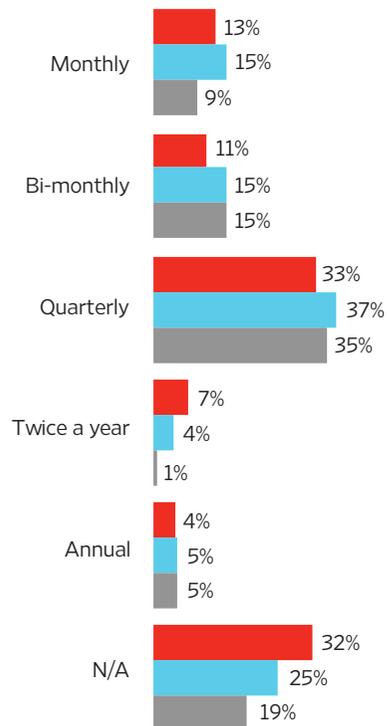


Trends in Frequency: Print.

Print magazines

Quarterly remains the preferred frequency for publishing print magazines, however the percentage of associations doing so has dropped slightly – from 37 per cent in 2013 to 33 per cent in 2014.

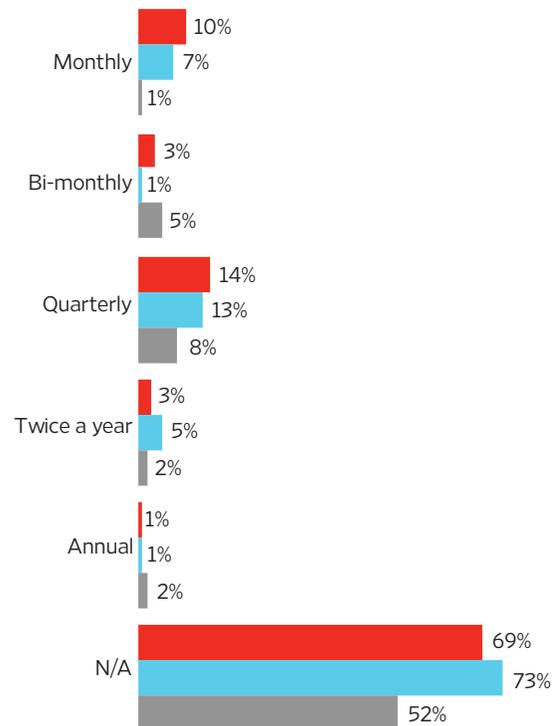
2014 2013 2012



Peer-reviewed journals

Nearly 70 per cent of respondents don't publish a peer-reviewed journal. Of those who do, a quarterly publishing cycle remains most popular.

2014 2013 2012



Demographics.

Who responded to the survey?

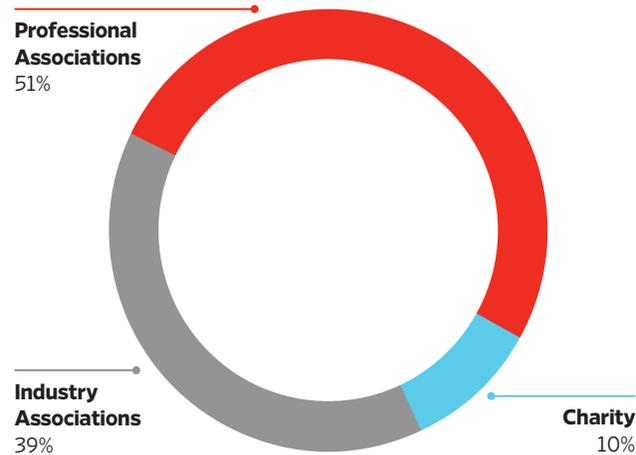
Representatives from 176 associations participated in this Australia-wide survey.

More than half the respondents hail from professional associations, while nearly 40 per cent are from industry associations.

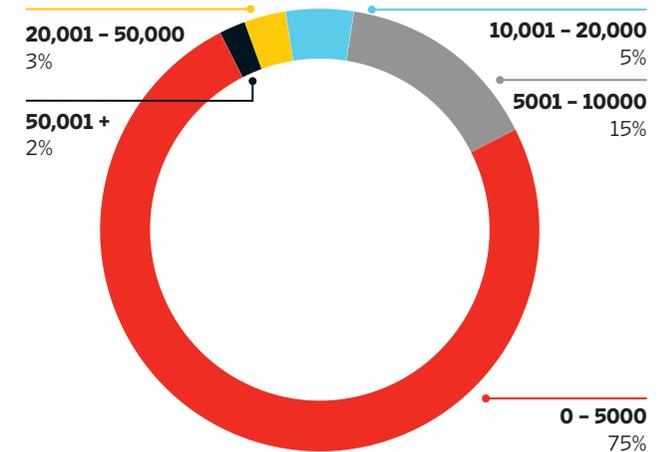
Around 90 per cent of those surveyed possess a member base of less than 10,000 members.

The survey was distributed by Associations Forum in November 2014.

Type of not-for-profit organisation



Number of members



About.

Who conducted the survey?

Associations Forum

can be best understood by its mission statement: 'Bringing associations together to boost performance'.

Established in 2004, Associations Forum is a commercial, member-based network of associations, charities, clubs, societies and other not-for-profit organisations.

It exists to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practice in the industry through a range of educational events and services.



Mahlab Media

is a content marketing agency that produces and implements content strategies for brands and associations.

Founded in 1997, the agency works with more than 20 clients across a diverse range of subjects including business, finance and banking, health, insurance, real estate, retirement, engineering, retail, travel, youth, pets, internal communications and associations.



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