



UNISON Virtual Branches

Guidance on using your Virtual Branch Website

The following are tips and guidance on how to get the best out of using your Virtual Branch website.

There are three principles suggested for using your site:

- **Simple effective content**
 1. content should be brief, within the visible webpage area if possible.
 2. When drafting an item, think first how you would explain it to a member and then write that down.
 3. Use links to other web content rather than importing it all to your site

- **Efficient use of your time**
 1. Any existing articles can be uploaded as files rather than as new web pages
 2. When publishing an item, read it and edit only where essential – ie if the meaning is unclear or if you feel it is too controversial.
 3. Do not spend time on formatting or adding complex features
 4. Reuse the same text in several places

- **Engaging with members**
 1. Ensure that new items are shown on the front page of your site
 2. Each new item should be considered as a new forum topic
 3. Consider any new item for a possible member consultation
 4. Be sure to send a regular email newsletter to members, informing them about new content, forum topics/posts and consultations.

1. Your website content – Suggested sources of content

- a.** Set up a standard web search on your branch/ employer and run this weekly to find news items to link to or refer to as content
- b.** Check local newspapers and their websites for issues that may affect members in their local communities or for public reactions to your employer.
- c.** Visit standard websites - UNISON website, TUC website, TUC unionreps, H&S website, ACAS, BBC news etc to check for possible new items.
- d.** Make regular contact with reps/stewards/officers for updates on local issues (see newsletters)
- e.** Make weekly contact with the branch secretary for an update on their current and forthcoming activities and for suggestions on what might be put on the site
 - i.** This can be done in the form of a brief visit or phone interview (See our Branch Secretary interview document)
- f.** Ensure that minutes of branch meetings and other UNISON meetings are published on the site and communicated via email newsletter.
- g.** Maintain a list of all suggested content ideas so that in the absence of new content you have a resource to use.
- h.** Raise the website at Branch Committee meetings and seek updates and ideas from those meetings.

2. Using forums – Suggested use of forum discussions

- a.** For any new item of content, consider adding a post in the forums.
 - i.** You can use the announcements forum to simply announce the news item is there (using the same text as the article)
 - ii.** You can use the members forum to ask for views on any news topic
- b.** Pick some topics and make a comment on them, and ask another activist to add their comments.
- c.** Use forums to encourage discussion of items in forthcoming meetings; by meeting attendees in private forums or more generally by members.

3. Member consultation – making use of forms for consultation

- a. Online forms can be used for consultations on any topic. Aim to set up a consultation at least on a monthly basis.
- b. Consultations should be kept simple, asking only a couple of clear questions and giving a chance for members to comment.
- c. A consultation should have its own news item and be featured on your consultation page and on the main from page.
- d. A consultation should be supported by a discussion topic in the forums.
- e. Members should be asked to log in to take part in the consultation.
- f. When the consultation is over the results should be published (after a review by the Branch Secretary) and this in itself is another news item, describing the level of response and comments, the overall results and a commentary from the branch.
- g. Many consultations can continue as discussion topics.
- h. Ensure that any consultation is promoted via newsletters whilst it is still live.

4. Issuing newsletters

- a. Set up a standard newsletter that simply reminded members about the site, and which includes their log in details. This newsletter can also remind about changes of details and other standard information. This newsletter can be sent at any point in the absence of other available content
- b. Create a newsletter to be issued to all stewards, reps and officers asking them to update the website editors on local issues, current work being done by them on behalf of members, or comments on possible content for the site. This newsletter should also remind activists to visit the forums and make comments so that members can add their voice to a discussion.
- c. When new items are loaded to the site, add them to a newsletter page (using the title as a link to the item and adding an introductory text taken from the item. Once several items are shown on your newsletter this can be issued to members to alert them to the new content.

5. Time spent on your site - It is suggested that you work to reduce the time taken in running the site.

Some tips for this are given below:

- a. For a new item, consider if there is already a document or web link to the topic. If so either upload the document itself or produce a simple page which directs people to the link and to the members forums to discuss it.
- b. When adding a page, allow yourself a set time to compose it, for example 5 minutes.
 - i. Think how you would explain the topic to a member face to face, (consider recording your explanation) and use this as the wording.
 - ii. You may wish to do this using Word or another similar program.
 - iii. Write the item, and review it for clarity, spelling, grammar and to ensure it says nothing untrue or too controversial.
 - iv. Use the opening line of your article for the description field on the site.
 - v. Publish the item to the site.
 - vi. Updates and amendments can be added later.
- c. Copy and paste part or all of your new item for use in forums, adding only a line requesting members views.
- d. Use the description text as the text to enter below the item title when compiling your newsletter
- e. Use the description text and title of a new item to add to the branch blog, linking to the article.

6. Making your content visible - it is important that when you load new items, they should be noticed by members.

- a. Use your front page welcome are (front_page.html) to announce new content.
 - i. Add a Latest Updates section: and the title link to your article into the front page section
 - ii. For some items you can add a link in the header links area below the site titles
 - iii. Some new items can be added into the left menu for extra emphasis.
- b. When adding news items, make the title clear. Use wording that will encourage members to view it.

- c. Announce new forum topics in your front page welcome area. Set up a standard "Use your forums" page which you can display in the news area at times.

- d. Keep the front page welcome area changing.
 - i. Set up a set of pictures to use on the front page and alternate them.
 - ii. Use a UNISON YouTube video and show it on your front page
 - iii. Move around the items on the front page so that members can see the site is being amended.

- e. Make sure that members are notified of new content via an email newsletter