

Future Strategies – Part 1
Unions and The Wider Society
Additional Background Material
ACTU CONGRESS 2003

NOTE

The ACTU *Future Strategies - unions working for a fairer Australia*, Part 1 *Unions and the Wider Society*, is the principle background paper for policy proposals under this agenda item. This should be read in conjunction with the additional material set out below.

Quick Fact:

The experience of the ACTU has been that when the 1300 number has been advertised in conjunction with a specific campaign the response has been significant. Non union workers do respond when unions connect with an issue that is relevant to them.

During the 2000 Bullying Campaign, newspaper and radio exposure resulted in over 5000 calls being received in one month. During the collapse of Ansett the call centre was fielding over 500 calls per day at one stage.

CONGRESS 2000

1. At Congress 2000 the following was adopted in relation to the call centre:

Congress endorses ... [f]urther development of the Call Centre for use by affiliates and the ACTU in organising, recruitment and retention campaigns.

Congress encourages affiliates to ... [u]se the ACTU Call Centre for polling, focus groups, membership and public campaigns and promotions.

ISSUES FOR POLICY AT CONGRESS 2003

ACTU Call Centre “Union Hotline”

2. The ACTU call centre has two main purposes:
 - to provide a central union hotline for workers who need advice and information about their workplace, and who want to join a union; and
 - to undertake call centre based work for unions, for example polling, market research and contacting unfinancial members.

Inbound Calls to the ACTU Call Centre

3. Workers who want to join a union, get information, or investigate the possibility of organising their workplace often have a difficult time trying to find the right union. Even the names of some unions can be difficult to understand. The ACTU call centre currently receives between 1,500 and 2,000 calls each month. These calls can be broadly placed into three categories:
 - information only calls;
 - servicing calls - non-members with pre-existing issues; and
 - genuine organising leads.
4. Information and servicing calls account for about 80% of calls received. The call centre currently focuses on maximising the number of organising leads from calls received, however many people only require basic information and not every caller or workplace represents an organising lead. The priority for the call centre is to provide information to workers in a friendly and professional manner that engages callers positively. Feedback from workers that contact the call centre indicates that:
 - most callers are not “politicised” and do not necessarily know that there is a union that covers their industry or workplace;

- many workers view union membership as a “service” - a commodity that can be purchased when needed, rather than something to which you belong; and
- callers have no appreciation of the resourcing issues facing unions and the strategic decisions being made to allocate scarce resources.

Referring Calls to Unions

5. There are no formal protocols between the ACTU and unions in handling referrals from the call centre. In some circumstances unions will not allow callers to the ACTU to join their union. There are a number of reasons for these decisions, such as:
 - the caller is a non-member and has a pre-existing issue which has little or no organising potential;
 - the caller is from a small workplace in an unorganised or difficult to organise industry sector, and where the union can not allocate resources;
 - the union has a fixed strategy that does not incorporate the workplace or sector where the caller works; or
 - the nature of the call is not effectively relayed to an organiser.
6. However, workers rarely understand the reasoning behind the decision and can form a negative view of unions resulting from their experience.

Current Marketing of the Call Centre

7. Research consistently demonstrates people want to join unions, but often do not know where to go.
8. The experience of the ACTU has been that when the 1300 number has been advertised in conjunction with a specific campaign the response has been significant. Non-union workers do respond when unions connect with an issue that is relevant to them.
9. During the 2000 Bullying Campaign, newspaper and radio exposure resulted in over 5000 calls being received in one month. During the collapse of Ansett the call centre was fielding over 500 calls per day at one stage.

Piloting a Central Union “Hotline”

10. It is proposed that the ACTU pilot a campaign to more broadly advertise the 1300 number as a central point for non-union workers to contact unions. This initiative can be accommodated within the existing ACTU call centre infrastructure. The objectives are to:

- raise awareness of the existence, legitimacy and role of unions among non-union workers;
- focus on a specific campaign being run by the ACTU and unions such as a growth sector of the workforce or a group of workers;
- provide information and advice through the call centre;
- provide a referral service for workers who need advice and representation, including a limited “fee for service” option through the call centre itself; and
- identify organising leads for unions.

Call Protocols

11. Protocols will be developed to manage the three categories of calls received by the ACTU call centre, namely:
 - information only calls,
 - servicing calls, and
 - organising lead calls.

Information Only Calls

12. The objective would be provide callers with basic information and contribute to creating a positive perception of unions among workers. Management of these calls will include:
 - Building the profile that unions are the relevant organisations to approach for information about work.
 - Referral of the caller to other service providers where appropriate.
 - Increased development and referral to the ACTU ‘Know Your Rights’ web site.
 - Development of further scripting to enable the mapping of callers’ workplaces.
 - Further development of scripts to increase caller understanding of unions.
 - Call follow-up though a phone call or email.

Servicing Calls

13. The objective is to provide non-union workers that have existing problems at their workplace with advice and information on the relevant union for their workplace. A protocol will be developed to identify how to refer these calls, including:
 - agreement by the relevant union to assist the worker;
 - referral to a labour law firm or other organisation such as JobWatch; and
 - servicing by the ACTU call centre on a fee for service basis on the condition that the caller then join the relevant union once the issue is resolved.
14. These approaches are not mutually exclusive and the option chosen would depend on the protocols established with each union and the caller's individual circumstances.

Organising Lead Calls

15. The objective is to identify and refer organising leads to unions. A protocol would include:
 - refinement of the call centre script to increase identification of leads;
 - ranking of organising leads according to specific criteria;
 - establishment of a contact person at each union with sufficient authority to make a judgement about the lead;
 - establishment of a 'lead protocol' with participating unions - this would include a 'use it or lose it' provision where unwanted leads could be provided to other interested unions;
 - establishment of a report back process from the union to the call centre on outcomes; and
 - establishment of a reporting process from the call centre to unions on the allocation of leads.

Marketing the 1300 Number

16. The marketing of the call centre number will include paid and unpaid advertising. Investigation will be undertaken to identify the most cost effective advertising available in major capital cities. Marketing channels might include:
 - paid advertising such as cinemas, billboards, and newspapers;

- postcards at cinemas and other venues;
 - a 1300 number on cinema vouchers (union members discount tickets);
 - free press from the launch of the call centre;
 - ongoing press from polling results during key campaigns;
 - the ACTU and other web sites;
 - campaign materials;
 - public transport tickets;
 - super fund magazine advertising; and
 - a banner outside the ACTU.
17. Unions have tried many of these techniques in the past with varying degrees of success. The primary lesson learned is the need for consistent and long-term messages across a number of mediums.
18. A 'brand' would have to be created for the call centre. At the moment the call centre is advertised in the White Pages as "Union Information Line".

Funding the Call Centre

19. The main costs would include:
- marketing of the 1300 number;
 - handling information only calls - ensuring an increase in these types of calls can be managed without significant cost implications;
 - handling servicing calls - ensuring any fees charged covered the cost of the servicing provided;
 - possible increased staffing levels; and
 - technology upgrades.
20. A pilot campaign would be needed to minimise the initial financial investment required to expand the call centre services. Incremental growth in call volumes could be accommodated by the current ACTU call centre infrastructure.

Reporting and Review

21. The call centre would report to the ACTU Executive and provide a review of the pilot after 12 months. This report would focus on:

- changes in call volumes;
 - changes in call handling and referrals; and
 - the outcomes of referrals of both new members and organising leads.
22. The ability of the call centre to provide reporting to this level is dependent on the development of reporting protocols with participating unions and is imperative if any meaningful assessment of the pilot is to be possible.

Non-industrial Member Services

23. The ACTU and unions are committed to providing members with access to a range of competitively priced and high quality products and services with the objective of raising their standard and quality of life. Using the bargaining strength of almost two million members, unionists are able to access services at preferential prices.
24. While not the core work of unions, member services can have an important role in union organising and, in particular, retention strategies. Utilising member services can bring people into closer contact with their union and have a demonstrable impact on their lives away from work. Member services can provide union organisers with a positive and relevant message to members and non-members.

The Role of the ACTU

25. Unions need to be able to provide services that meet the specific needs of their members, whether on a local level or nationally. The ACTU's objective is to develop and market member services that have broad appeal to all unions and their members. The ACTU has therefore clearly defined under what circumstances it will develop and offer services to unions and their members, namely where:
- significant savings can be provided through economies of scale;
 - the nature of the project demands significant resources to undertake the due diligence and set up; and
 - a time consuming ongoing relationship is required and the ACTU can allocate sufficient resources to the management of this relationship.
26. Further, the ACTU demands of potential commercial partners include:
- the preparedness and capacity of the service provider to commit financial resources to promote the venture over a long period of time;
 - a political angle to capture the imagination of union members; and

- a shared philosophy between the service provider and unions.
27. The more successful services sponsored by the ACTU meet these criteria.

Members Equity

28. Members Equity (ME) was established in 1994 by the ACTU, in partnership with National Mutual (now AXA), as Super Member Home Loans. Since that time it has advanced over \$8 billion in home loans to union and super fund members. ME is now 100% owned by Australian workers through their industry super funds.
29. Traditionally, unions have provided banking services through credit unions, which have delivered substantial benefits to members and their families. ME conducts its activities with the same shared values of mutualism and community.
30. In 2001 ME was granted a banking licence, and since then has launched low cost banking services for workers, unions and employers. In an environment of increasing fees from the major banks, these products have proved popular, and have repeatedly been found to be amongst the most competitive on the market. The new services include:
- home loans;
 - credit cards;
 - savings account; and
 - personal loans.
31. ME does not have a huge marketing budget, and believes that promoting its products through superannuation funds and unions will assist it in keeping costs low and remaining responsive to the needs of ordinary workers and their families.

Promoting Members Equity

32. Unions have played a significant role in the development of ME, particularly in providing access to members at the workplace.
33. Unions are pivotal to the future success of ME, and to the broader strategy, of which it is part, namely ensuring the future of industry superannuation funds. Industry funds and ME continue to face competition from high cost master trusts promoted by the banks and other major financial services providers.
34. ME offers union organisers a message that resonates with workers, who are generally extremely hostile to what they see as the self-interest and greed of the major banks. As with industry funds, ME products can deliver significant savings to workers throughout their working lives through lower fees and interest rates.

35. Unions are promoting ME in a number of ways:
- advertisements and inserts in union journals;
 - editorial in union journals;
 - sponsorship of delegates' conferences;
 - access to delegate training courses; and
 - access to major workplaces.
36. Some unions are seeking agreements with employers to pay wages into ME accounts and otherwise facilitate workers' access to ME.

Financial Advice

37. The ACTU has coordinated a national panel of endorsed financial advisers since 1996. Financial advisers included on the panel have been screened and approved by the ACTU.
38. Many people require financial advice at some time in their working lives. Effective financial advice can be the difference between a secure future and an uncertain one.
39. Selecting a financial adviser can prove challenging for many people. Some financial advisers sell their clients financial products that provide high commissions to the adviser, rather than the most appropriate investment for the client.
40. This practice, among others, was identified by a survey of the financial planning industry conducted in early 2003 by ASIC and the Australian Consumers Association.
41. The findings of the survey vindicate the due diligence undertaken by the ACTU when selecting financial advisers for the panel and the care taken by unions when referring members to financial advisers.
42. Financial advisers and dealer groups are admitted onto the ACTU panel only if they meet the strict criteria established by the ACTU. Ongoing due diligence also provides a governance framework monitored by the ACTU.

Virtual Communities

43. In 1999 Virtual Communities was launched. It has the backing of unions and super funds that continue to own significant equity in the venture.
44. Since 1999 Virtual Communities has provided over 50,000 union members with affordable technology through the Virtual Communities PC and internet package.

45. The “digital divide” continues to be an issue for workers and their families and access to the internet, whether using the web for educational, recreational or business purposes is an important communication tool.
46. Virtual Communities has maintained its commitment to providing union members with a discount on all its services. Virtual Communities is developing “broadband” and “internet only” services for union members, in addition to continuing its range of PC and internet packages.

Union Shopper

47. Union Shopper was an initiative of the Queensland Teachers Union and has now been successfully providing union members with a discount shopping service for 25 years.
48. With the assistance of the ACTU, Union Shopper provides a national service to union members through subscribing unions.