RICOCHET
ASSOCIATION TRANSFORMATION

2026 VMAE SUMMER CONFERENCE

Adding media channels.

Reaching members where they already are.

PRESENTER

Chris Gloede, CAE — Chief Consultant, Ricochet

Hilton Anaheim
Friday, July 10, 2026

6,000

Marketing messages the average person sees every day.

85% of associations recruit mainly by email

Just 8% use SMS

How many of yours are just… more email?

Source: ChiefMarTech, State of Martech 2026; MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

Hello.

A quick hello before we get to work.



CAE CERTIFIED ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE

RICOCHET ASSOCIATION TRANSFORMATION

HELLO

Chris Gloede, CAE

Chief Consultant, Ricochet

Chris was the first-ever Chief Marketing Officer of the American Bar Association, where he grew membership to its largest in 137 years, making it one of the largest voluntary associations in the world.

Chris now helps associations build modern membership strategies, value propositions, technology stacks, and marketing campaigns that drive growth.

Why add channels now.

Email still works. It's just not enough on its own anymore.

Email is the floor, not the whole house.

We're not replacing email — we're building around it.

Four generations, four life experiences, four viewpoints.

NEXT GENERATION

Baby Boomers

BORN	**1946–1964**
AGE TODAY	**62–80**
U.S. SIZE	**~73M**
EVENTS	**Post-WWII, Cold War**

Heaviest users of TV, radio and print — though most now keep a Facebook account to stay in touch with family.

Gen X

BORN	**1965–1980**
AGE TODAY	**46–61**
U.S. SIZE	**~65M**
EVENTS	**Fall of Berlin Wall, dot-com bubble**

Still reads print and watches cable, but logs the most weekly hours on Facebook of any generation.

Gen Y (Millennials)

BORN	**1981–1996**
AGE TODAY	**30–45**
U.S. SIZE	**~74M**
EVENTS	**9/11, Great Recession**

Cut the cable cord for streaming and carry multiple social accounts across every device.

Gen Z

BORN	**1997–2012**
AGE TODAY	**14–29**
U.S. SIZE	**~69M**
EVENTS	**Social media boom, COVID-19**

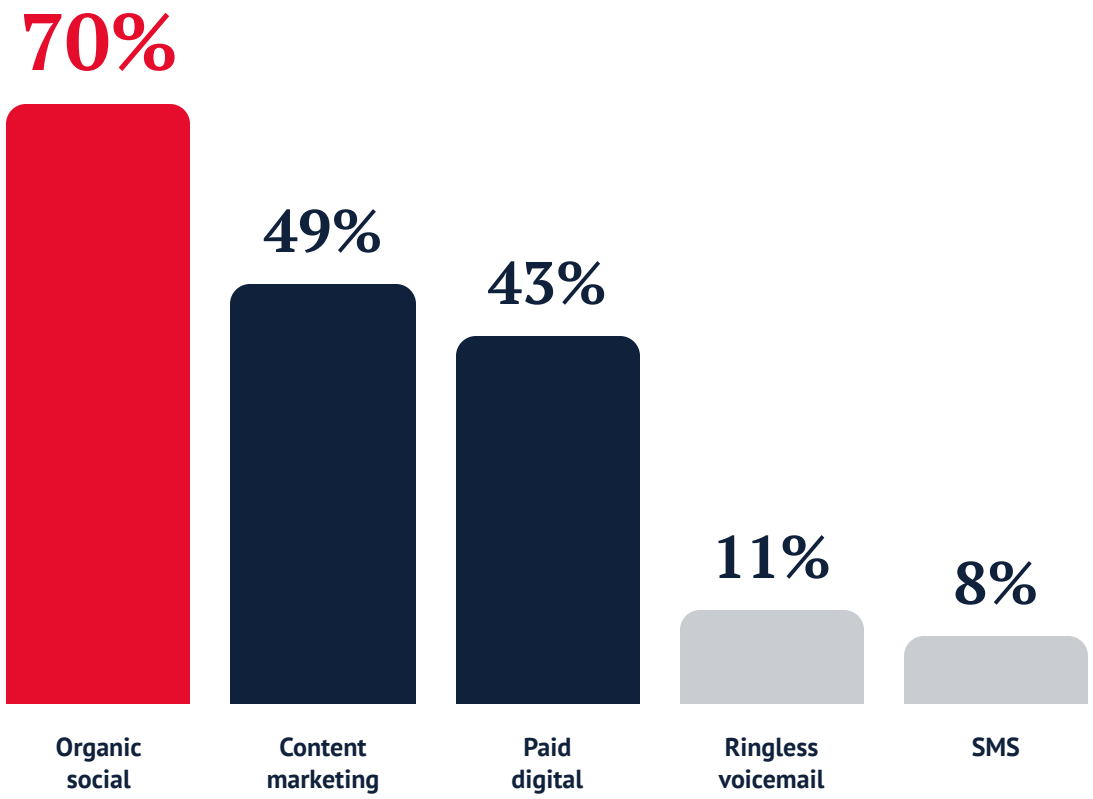
Mobile-first and always on — the smartphone is their primary channel for communication, search, and news.

Source: Kasasa, "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, Gen A and Gen B Explained," 2025 (birth years, current age, U.S. population, media consumption, key shaping events).

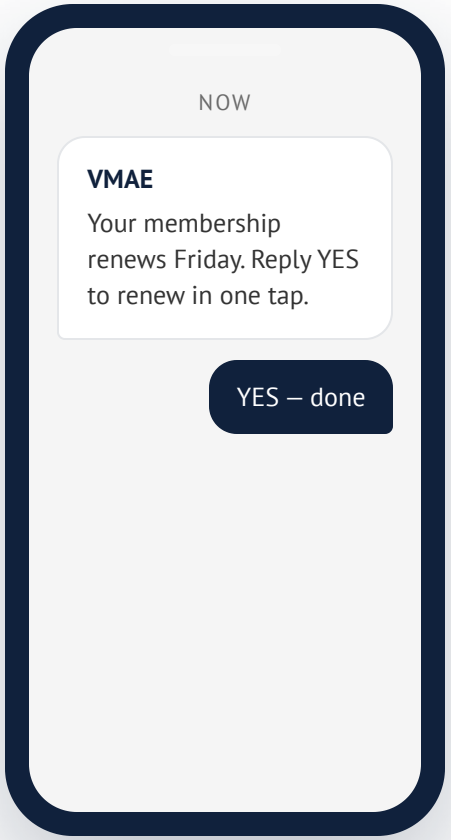
The shift beyond email is already underway.

The field has already diversified. Email-only is now the laggard position — not the safe one.

70% now recruit with organic social — up from 65%



Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report; Momentive, "Reach Members Faster with SMS," 2025.



But members live on their phones.

75% of millennials and Gen Z prefer a text over a phone call.

91%
own a smartphone

98–99%
of texts are opened

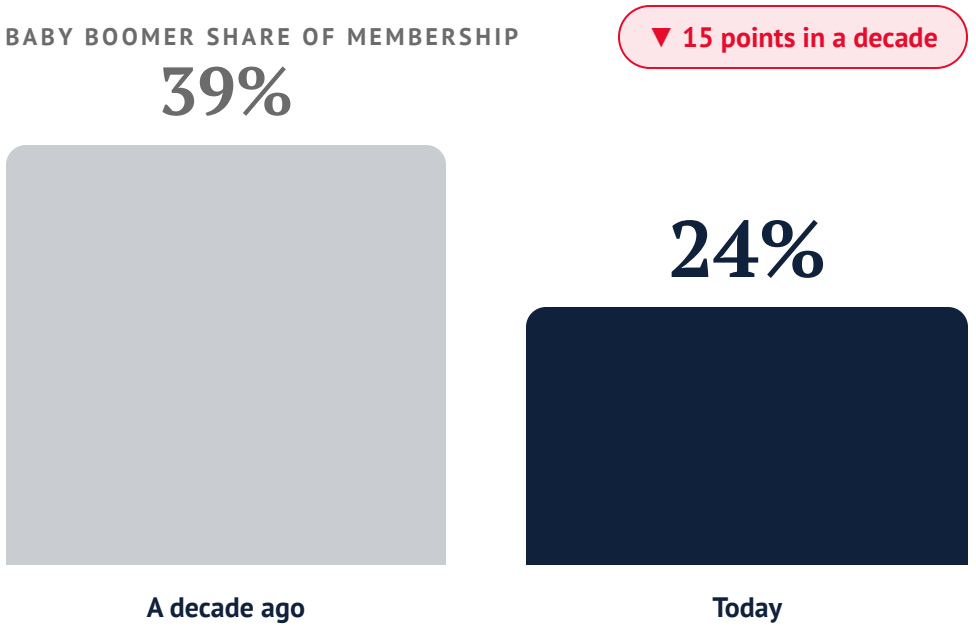
95%
read within 3 minutes

8%
of associations recruit by SMS

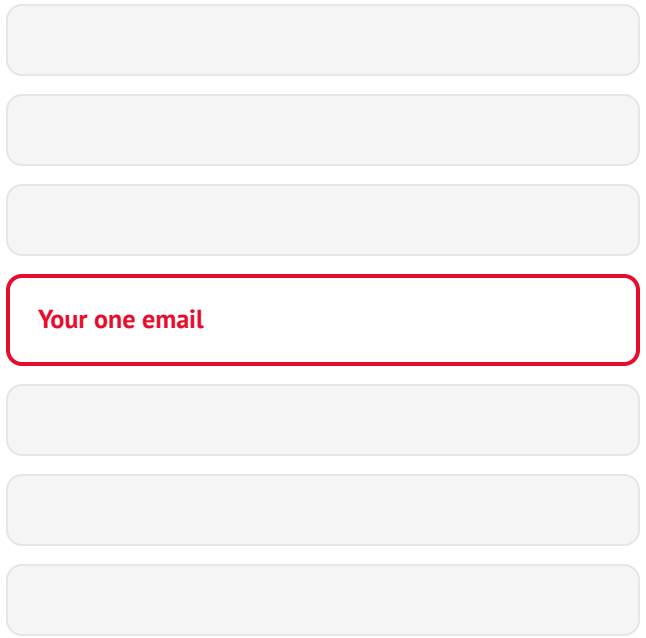
Source: Momentive, "Reach Members Faster with SMS," 2025; MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

Your membership is getting younger — and associations are not responding

Associations with **no younger-member strategy collapsed from 20% to 2%** in one year.



Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.



One message ≠ one decision.

Decisions build across repeated, varied touches. Spread beats volume.

51% of members already say they get too many emails.

"Information overload" — a top-3 challenge (52%)

6,000 messages a day

The fix is distribution, not volume — a text + a social touch + an email beats four emails.

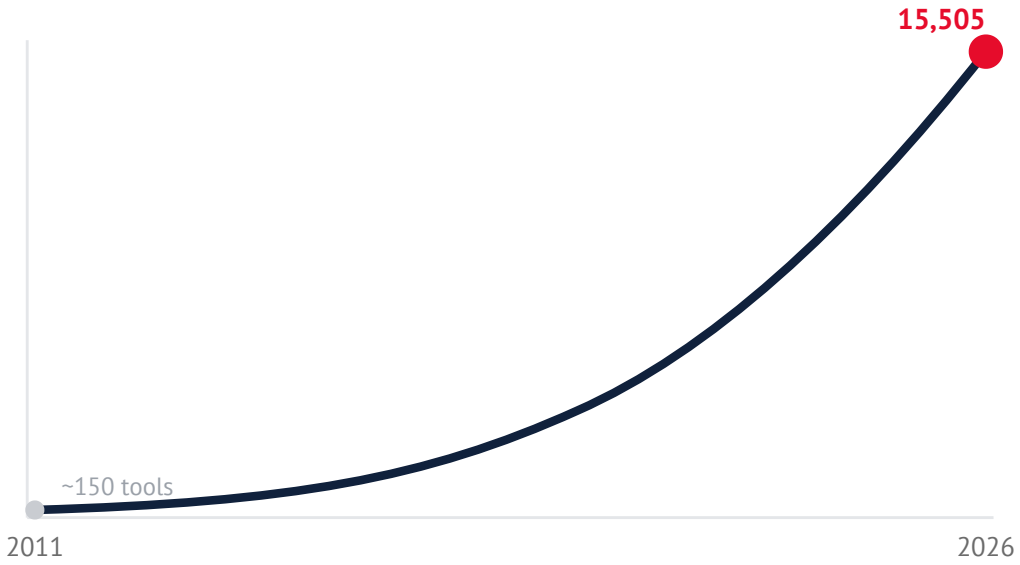
Source: Higher Logic, 2025 Association Member Experience Report; Naylor, 2025 Association Benchmarking Report; ChiefMarTech, State of Martech 2026.

It's finally feasible (and still necessary).

The tools got cheap, simple, and connected. The barrier is gone.

The martech explosion.

15,505 marketing tools in 2026 — about 100× since 2011.



Growth is now flat (**0.79% last year**) — a maturing market, not a shrinking one.

Free tiers and usage-based pricing let you start near zero.

29,000+ tool connectors appeared in ~18 months.

Source: ChiefMarTech, State of Martech 2026.

Generators vs. agents, in plain language.

23% now use AI in membership marketing — up from 18%, with another 5% implementing now.

GENERATE

Writes the message.

↓

AGENT

Automates it — analyzing across systems and sources, directing actions.

Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

From generating to delivering.

The associations already using AI are seeing the payoff.

STEP 1

Generate.

AI drafts the message.

STEP 2

Automate.

Rules send it on a trigger.

STEP 3

Deliver.

It reaches the member.

Human in the loop — set it up once, keep a person in charge.

79% report increased staff productivity.

Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

The connective layer: marketing automation platforms.

Software that ties channels together and sends the right message automatically — on a join, a lapse, an event registration.

57% of associations use an automation platform.

COMMON PLATFORMS TO KNOW

- ActiveCampaign
- Constant Contact
- Higher Logic Thrive
- HubSpot
- Keap
- Mailchimp
- PropFuel

Not an endorsement — a map.
Pick for your budget, your AMS, and what you'll actually use.

Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

The channel scorecard.

Four channels, three questions each: Impact, Simplicity, Affordability.

Organic social.

70% ▲ up from 65%

use organic social to recruit — core, not optional.

60% Social is the #1 strategy for engaging younger members.

Reddit and LinkedIn increasingly power discovery — including how AI tools surface your brand.

Free in dollars, not in hours — consistent posting is a real staff-time cost.

Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report; ChiefMarTech, State of Martech 2026.

Organic social.

Free in dollars, not in hours.

BEST ROLE

Ongoing trust, visibility, and being found — a slow burn, not a direct transaction driver.

SCORECARD RATING

IMPACT	★★★☆☆
SIMPLICITY	★★★☆☆
AFFORDABILITY	★★★★☆

PLATFORMS: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit, TikTok

Paid social.

43%

already run paid digital advertising — its strength is influence over time.

MOST-USED PAID PLATFORMS



Instagram up from 16% a year earlier — the fastest riser.

Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

Paid social.

High influence, higher effort.

BEST ROLE

Awareness + retargeting to move non-members and lapsed members toward joining or renewing. Pair with a landing page and one clear next step.

SCORECARD RATING

IMPACT	★★★★☆
SIMPLICITY	★★☆☆☆
AFFORDABILITY	★★★☆☆

PLATFORMS LinkedIn Campaign Manager | Meta Ads Manager

Ringless voicemail.

11% ▲ up from 9%

of associations now use RVM in renewal campaigns.

Still climbing.

One of the few direct channels rising year over year, while most plateau.

A human voice cuts through.

A recognized voice lands differently than one more text or email in the queue.

Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

Ringless voicemail.

Cheap, easy, high-touch.

BEST ROLE

Warm, branded messages from a board president or ED — welcomes, thank-yous, event invites, re-engaging lapsed members. Not hard asks.

SCORECARD RATING

IMPACT	★★★☆☆
SIMPLICITY	★★★★☆
AFFORDABILITY	★★★★☆

VENDORS DropCowboy Slybroadcast

SMS.

98–99%

text open rate — the highest of any channel members use.

95%
read within 3 minutes

75%
of younger members prefer text

8%
of associations recruit by SMS — the gap

14%
now use it in renewal campaigns

Source: Momentive, 2025; MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

SMS.

Strong engagement, growing adoption.

BEST ROLE

Time-sensitive nudges — renewal deadlines, event reminders, "last chance." Keep it rare and relevant.

SCORECARD RATING

IMPACT	★★★★☆
SIMPLICITY	★★★★☆
AFFORDABILITY	★★★★☆

VENDORS

ActiveCampaign · DropCowboy · HubSpot · Mailchimp · Sakari · Slybroadcast

The connective layer: marketing automation platforms.

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- PropFuel

Not an endorsement — a map.
Pick for your budget, your AMS, and what you'll actually use.

Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

The scorecard at a glance.

The “hot” channel isn't always the right first move, consider your capabilities and true audience needs.

CHANNEL	IMPACT	SIMPLICITY	AFFORD.	IN A PHRASE
Organic social	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆	Free in dollars, not in hours
Paid social	★★★★☆	★★☆☆☆	★★★☆☆	High influence, higher effort
Ringless voicemail	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	Cheap, easy, high-touch
SMS	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	Strong engagement, growing adoption

THE CONNECTIVE LAYER Marketing Automation Platform coordinates email and all channels for a powerful digital experience.

Using AI to guide your channel strategy.

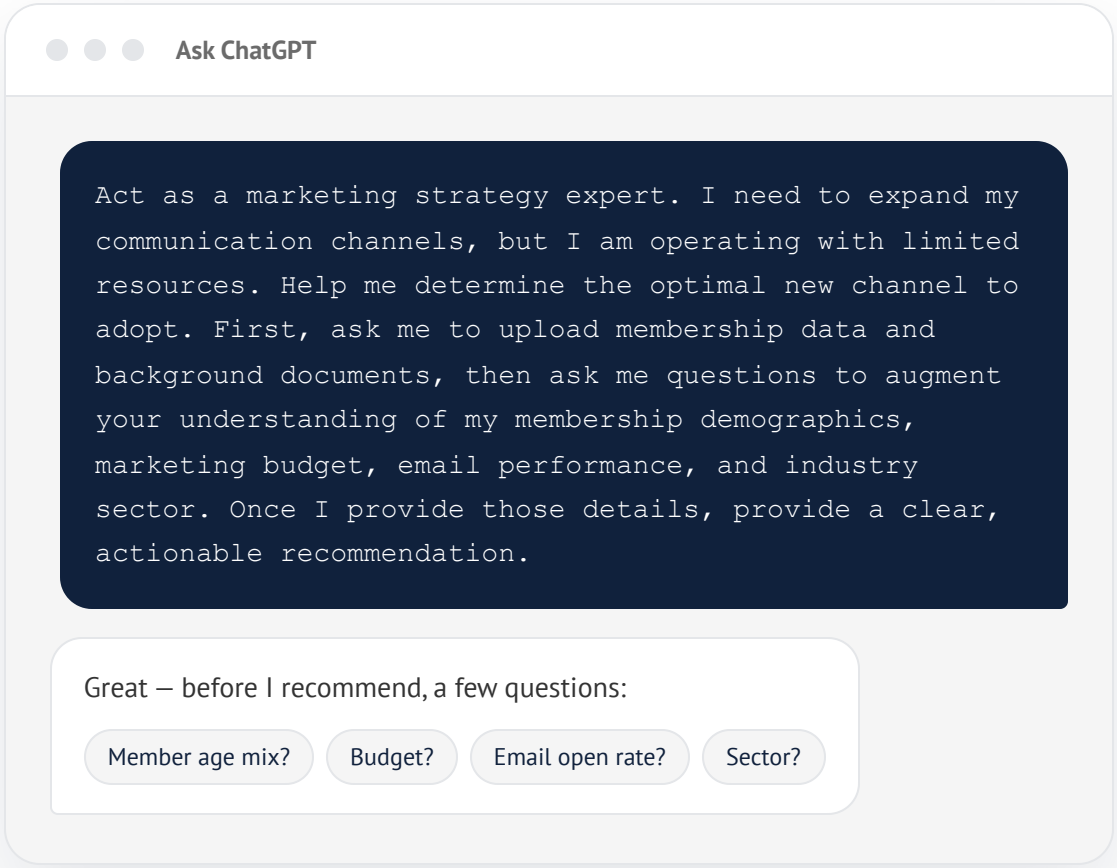
You just saw the generic scorecard. AI can build yours.

Ask AI before you pick a channel.

Its best marketing job for a small staff isn't writing posts — it's helping you decide where to show up.

33%
cite staff expertise as a top barrier

32%
cite bandwidth — the gap an advisor closes

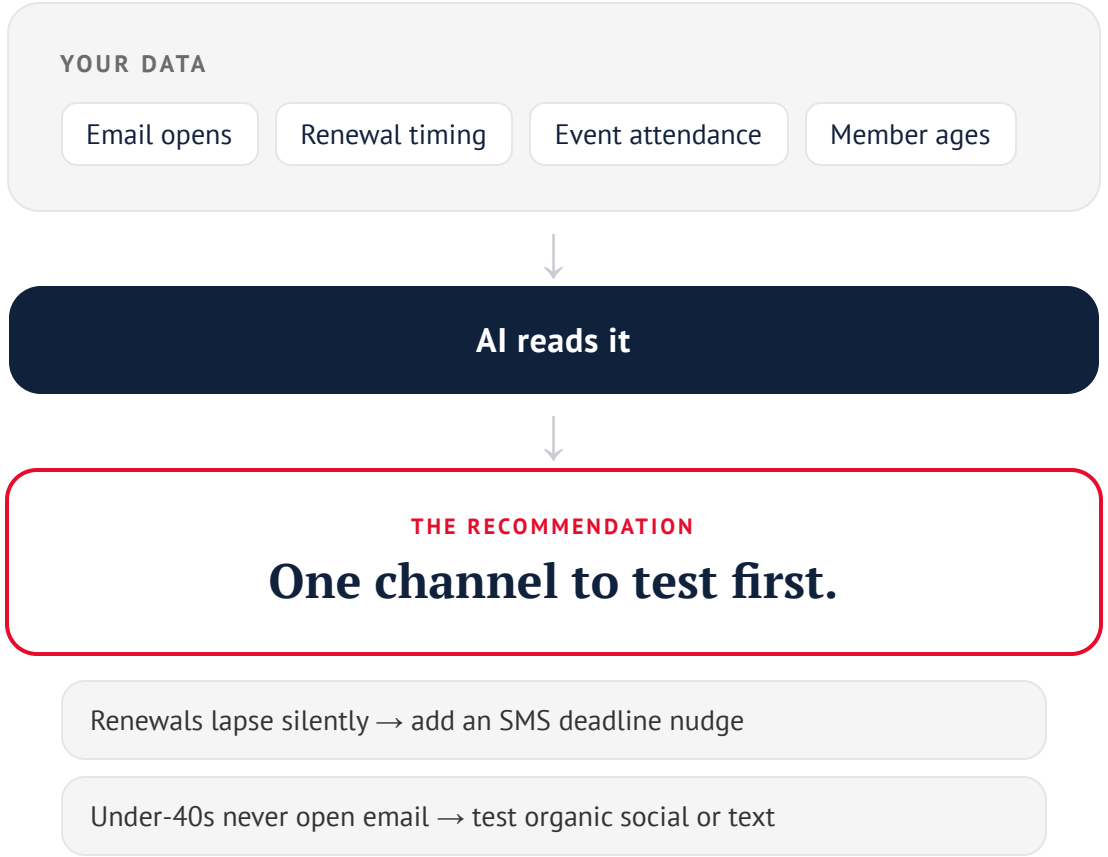


Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

Share your own data to find the biggest gap.

53% of AI-using associations apply it to data analysis and insights — and personalization has doubled (22% → 47%).

Import your data and ask — "Where are we over-messaging? Which segments never open email? What channel would reach them?"



Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.

AI recommends. You decide.

94% of members are comfortable with associations using AI — if it stays transparent and human-centered.

AI proposes the plan; a human approves it, owns the voice, and answers the replies **(what's next)**.

AI PROPOSES

The channel plan and the draft.

↓

YOU DECIDE

Approve it. Own the voice.

Source: Higher Logic, 2025 Association Member Experience Report; GrowthZone, 2026 Association Survey.

Yes, but…

The real-world obstacles — and how a small team handles them.

Yes, but my team is tiny.

You don't have to add everything — add one thing well.

33%
cite lack of staff expertise as a top barrier to adopting new tools

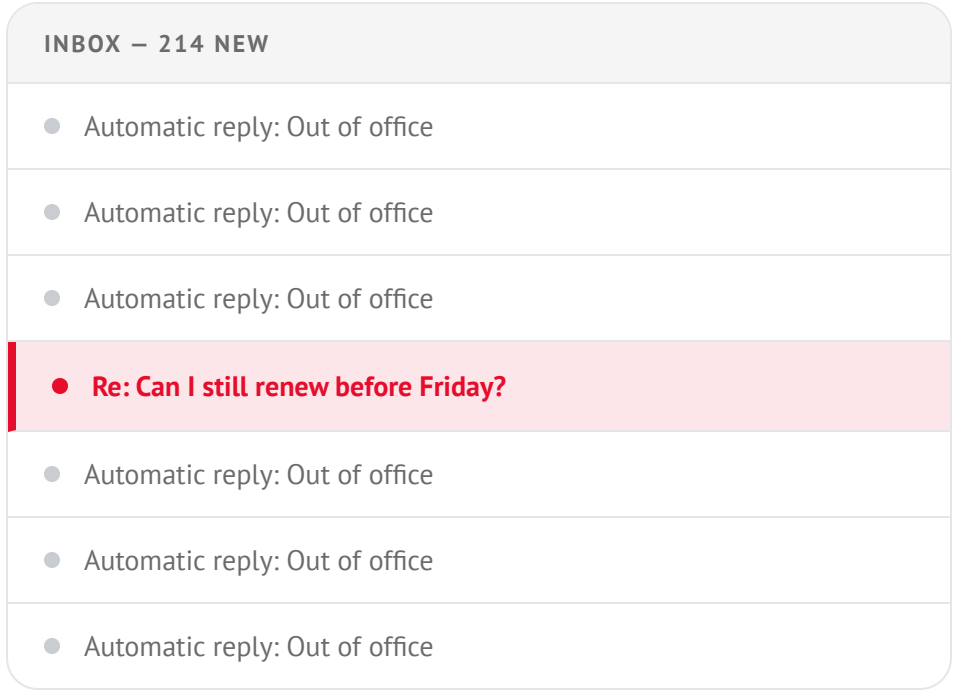
32%
cite limited staff bandwidth (time) as a top barrier

DO ONE THING

- **SMS**
- **Ringless voicemail**
- **Paid social**
- **Organic social**

One channel › One message › One quarter ›

Source: MGI, 2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report.



Yes, but our members don't engage.

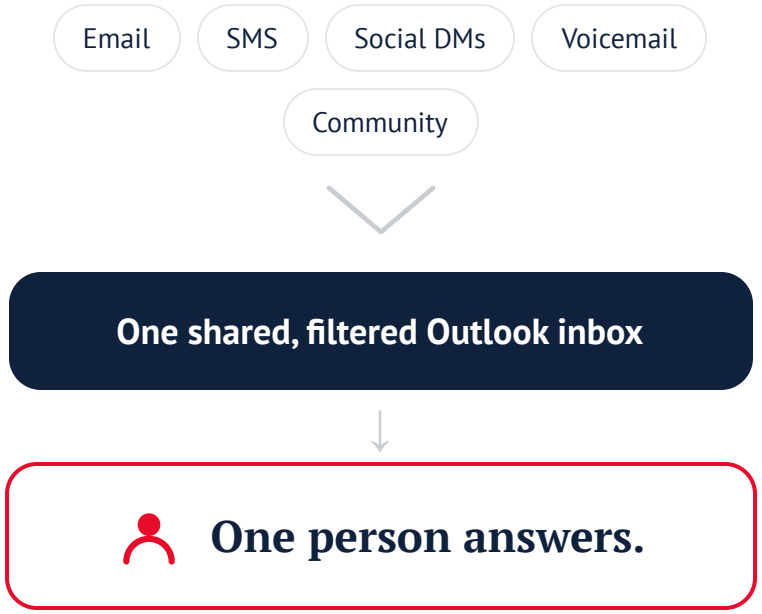
If you invite a response, you receive a response. Buried in 200 out-of-office auto-replies is often **one real member reply** — and it's easy to miss.

Open a channel and replies come back everywhere — texts, comments, DMs. Scattered across ten inboxes, an unchecked Facebook page, and a phone no one answers, members reach out and hear nothing.

Yes, but we don't have the technology.

One shared, filtered Outlook inbox — not replies landing in ten individual mailboxes.

One owner responding across email replies, texts, social comments/DMs, and community posts.



The goal is a human connection.

Multi-channel earns trust only if someone's home. Centralizing isn't about tidiness — it's that a real person is ready to reply, connect the member to the next step, and help them transact.



Go deeper with an Academy course.

Learn more newsletter strategy and design best practices in the **Association AI Accelerator Certificate Course** — ten live weekly classes teaching advanced AI techniques for practical association use.

[redacted] Regular ~~$599~~
FREE for VMAE members.

www.ricochetadvice.com/academy

Coming up this afternoon.

61% of members say email is their primary way to stay connected to associations.

But 51% already feel over-messaged



UP NEXT

Part 2:
Run Newsletters Like a Newsroom

Source: Higher Logic, 2025 Association Member Experience Report.

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CONNECT

Let's keep the conversation going.

Bring your channel plan.

Chris Gloede, CAE

Chief Consultant, Ricochet

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BOOK A CALL
ricochetadvice.com/meet-with-us

Sources.

01 ChiefMarTech (Scott Brinker & Frans Riemersma), *State of Martech 2026*.

02 Marketing General Inc. (MGI), *2026 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report* (18th ed.).

03 Momentive, "How Small-Staff Associations Can Reach Members Faster with SMS," 2025.

04 Higher Logic, *2025 Association Member Experience Report*.

05 Naylor / Association Adviser, *2025 Association Benchmarking Report*.

06 Kasasa, "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, Gen A and Gen B Explained," 2025.

07 GrowthZone, *2026 Annual Association Survey Results*.

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