

COVID-19 impact report



For associations,
membership bodies
and charities

Contents

4	Introduction
5	Preparation
6	Government support, funding and association collaboration
8	Communication
10	Communicating success
12	Member services
16	Impact on memberships
20	Events and conferences
24	Publications
25	Effectiveness of print channel increases during COVID crisis
26	Employee welfare and working from home
30	Keeping teams motivated
30	Second spike and safety concerns
31	The future



Introduction

Gordon Glenister, membership strategy consultant

COVID-19 will go down in history as one of the most impactful diseases of our time. While there have of course been many negative outcomes for businesses and individuals, the pandemic has also instigated opportunity and transformation, and we have seen this within the membership community.

This report outlines the results of a survey carried out in July 2020. It was completed by associations, professional bodies and charities representing thousands of members and employees and included

interviews with more than 30 chief executives of membership bodies and trade associations.

Commissioned by Pelican Communications and Synergy, and conducted by myself, the research found many trade associations and professional bodies have been under extreme pressure to sustain membership and other services. But what the results also reflect is an encouraging resilience and a renewed sense of purpose for many organisations that in some cases have been ground-breaking.

Over 75% of respondents have a reserves policy of six months or more.

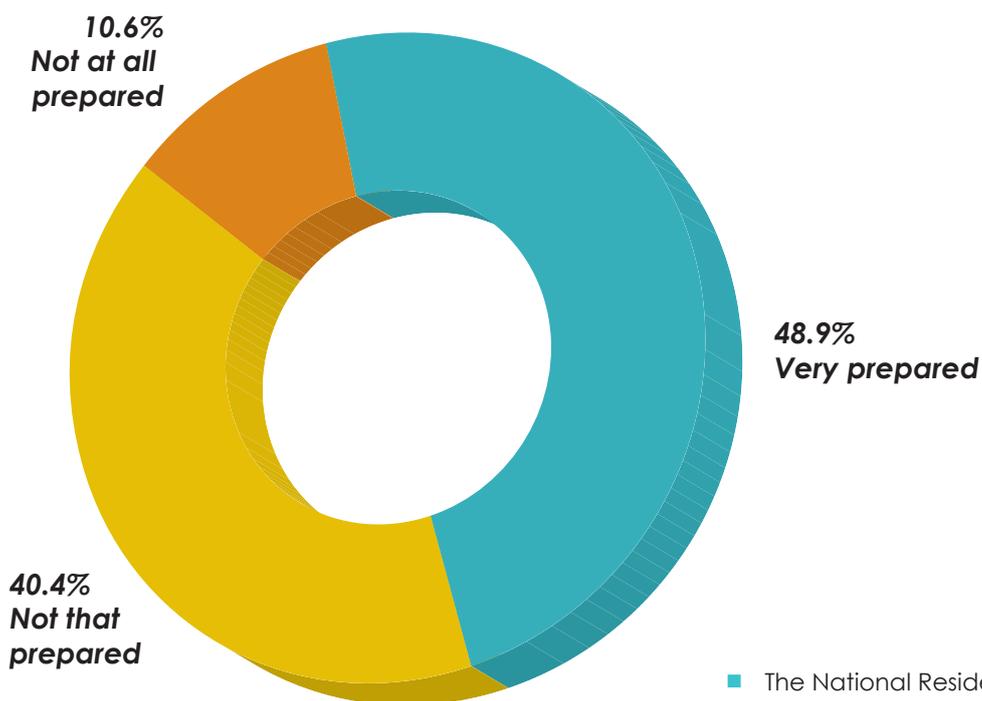
More than half were not prepared ahead of lockdown.

Preparation

Asked how prepared organisations were for the pandemic there was an almost even split, with 49% saying they were very prepared and 40% not at all prepared. Although more than 75% have a reserves policy of more than six months costs covered, a lot depended on renewal dates and event exposure as to whether the reserves were used.

What this has allowed organisations to do is revisit their strategy, including looking at what roles are going to be more important. The speed in which lockdown happened meant several very quick decisions needed to be taken. The first for many was prioritising staff and ensuring IT systems were able to be set up, even if that meant dusting down a few spare laptops.

Q. How prepared were you for the impact of coronavirus on your organisation?



- The National Residential Landlords Association was prepared at least two weeks before lockdown, giving them an opportunity to test everything. This proved invaluable as there were a few bugs to rectify and the usual 360 calls per day increased to 600 during lockdown.
- Andy Burman, CEO of the British Dietetics Association, moved into new offices in 2019 and had already moved everything onto a cloud-based system which made for easier transition to remote working.



Government support, funding and association collaboration

At the start of lockdown the government offered a range of measures to support businesses, from grants for the hospitality and retail industries to loans for small businesses. The level of investment from UK government is around £160bn, according to the latest treasury figures.

But, prior to August, a lot of businesses were left out, including more than 2 million self-employed people and businesses less than three years old. So how do associations feel they have fared?

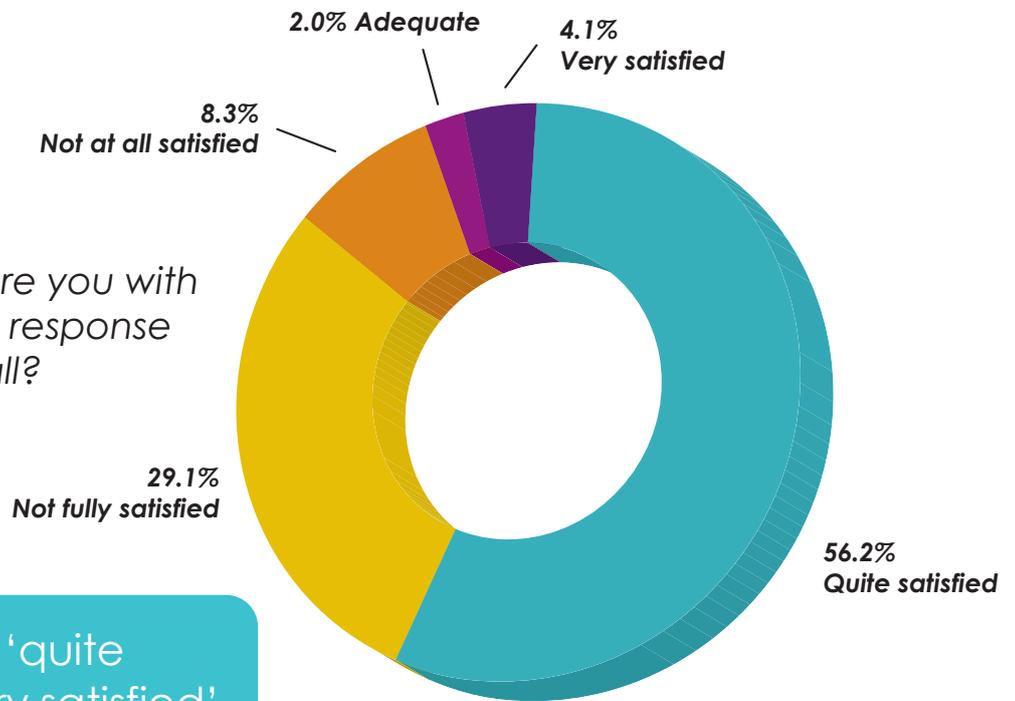
Only 4% of respondents to our survey felt the level of support was 'very satisfactory', with more than half being 'quite satisfied'. There was a feeling that short-term government support has been welcomed, with some 9.5 million people in the furlough scheme now, but there is growing concern about what will happen when this ends in October.

According to the Chambers of Commerce, which conducted its own survey, a third of respondents will be laying people off. As a result, the government set up a retention bonus scheme; a £9bn fund which amounts to £1,000 per employee providing they are still employed by January 2021. But in some cases this will go to organisations and businesses that were already going to bring people back from furlough.

Within associations, acceptance of government support varies between sectors. Many associations felt they had never busier while others (46%) made the decision to furlough some staff and 31% of organisations accepted the opportunity to defer their VAT.

Feedback was that, in the early part of the pandemic, the government was not in touch with the widespread impact it was going to have on many businesses and individuals. Associations galvanised quickly to lobby parliament to help their communities and industries. It was clear that government departments could not take on all the representations, so focused on larger groups or combined association groups.

Q. How satisfied are you with the government's response to Covid-19 overall?



Nearly 60% are 'quite satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with government support.

45% of respondents were able to use the government furlough scheme and 62% were able to lobby government.

More than 60% of those surveyed have been able to lobby directly or indirectly and share information with members.

- Ben Cheadle from the National Residents and Landlords Association said it was able to get greater access than ever before, including direct contact with the housing minister, and joint working party.
- Members of the Greeting Card Association were faced with an immediate challenge as almost all greeting cards are sold in a physical store. It lobbied hard through government and its connections in the Independent Retailers Confederation, which includes a number of trade associations. CEO Amanda Fergusson said this helped enormously.
- The British Independent Retail Association has been working with the British Retail Association and has regular calls with government. CEO Andrew Goodacre said: "They have listened to us on the impact on town centres and the support around business rates relief."
- Ian Studd, director general of The British Association of Removers, said: "Through this crisis, BAR has become the go-to voice for the removals industry in the UK and the contacts made with various influencing groups will certainly be maintained and further developed."

- Robin Osterley, chief executive of the Charity Retail Association, said: "It would normally take up to five weeks to arrange some of these government meetings. Now they're organised in a matter of days. We are pleased the government has treated charity shops the same way it has other retail businesses and it has been a lifesaver to receive the £10k and £25k grants."
- Peter Ward, chief executive of the Warehousing Association, said: "Lobbying is a horrible word. We should not always look at government to blame. I want to create a position that the government is the conduit of shaping policy rather than a begging bowl for money."
- The Advertising Association, which represents more than 30 marketing-related associations, was found to be highly effective at lobbying during lockdown with up to 10 government officials joining weekly Zoom meetings. It has also been involved in pushing forward an advertising tax credit.



“The first month was hectic and as fast as we were putting information on the website it was changing, sometimes hourly. We have seen a 400% increase in our web traffic.”

Andy Burman,
British Dietetic Association



Communications

Communications and marketing teams have been working flat out during the pandemic. Because there was so much news, some of which was sensational and inaccurate, industry bodies have become a place to access reliable information.

Getting the key government actions distilled into an industry relevant-message has been important, and although some associations have struggled to contact members due the scale of furlough, weekly webinars and briefings have become commonplace.

- CEO of the European Sponsorship Association, Andy Westlake, said as many as 300 people have been attending its weekly webinars, some from an International audience. The ESA also launched a regular industry sentiment checker which was updated every four weeks. The association had many challenges from its members as sponsorship was so connected to live sports that weren't happening, but surprisingly only 10% had asked for refunds and 30% were using engaging ways to repurpose their assets. Many brands are now looking at Esports as a result.

Many associations have used the home page of their website to signpost to coronavirus-related content and 93% say the website has been the main channel for content, with 88% also using social media. In fact, 82% of respondents said social media engagement has improved and this was seen as vital to a wider communications strategy.

But email still provides the main source of communication for the vast majority (more than 95%) of organisations and daily briefings to both staff and members were commonplace in the early stages of lockdown.

Despite the relevance and importance of external communications, only 26% suggested they would spend more on this in the next six months. Some organisations created and shared a strategic message, such as Badminton England's 'Protect, Prepare and Play' slogan, with a focus on the safety of the sport.



89% intend to run direct communications with members to promote membership benefits.

- Robin Osterley from Charity Retail Association said: "We ran a couple of re-opening meetings in May. More than 200 attended our Zoom meetings, and overall 1,600 attended this which is a huge increase and great exposure for the association."
- Debbie Hunter, director of commercial affairs from the Cosmetic Perfume and Toiletries Association, said it had in excess of 12,000 hits on one of its news items on the website. In addition to the government advice, it provided counter guidance for members involved in the beauty sector, a problematic close-contact industry. In addition, it provided a matching service for members and companies wishing to make hand sanitiser, even receiving requests from breweries. By the end of April more than 180 matches were completed. One prospective member they had been speaking to for over a decade converted following specialist advice from the association.
- Faced with a looming crisis in the advertising industry, The Advertising Association went into overdrive as soon as lockdown was announced, sending a planned message to all member associations: SURVIVE, THRIVE and REVIVE. CEO Stephen Woodford said: "We were frantically busy with daily meetings and our initial plan was to survey members and feed back into government."
- The National Association of Estate Agents Property Mark represents 17,500 members. CEO Mark Hayward was regularly in touch with the housing minister as the property market ground to a temporary halt. He said: "We needed to communicate on a daily basis given the impact to the sector. One webinar was viewed by 20,000 live and a further 11,000 watched the recorded version. There has never been a better a time to review your business. We are going to have good people at the front and probably greater technology at the back, which will no doubt involve a reduction in the industry workforce. There won't be a brand on every high street, but more hubs instead, and London is no longer the main commuter destination. We have been able to prove the worth of membership. The organisation campaigned hard for a stamp duty reduction to kick-start the economy and won it."



Communicating SUCCESS

**Michael Bennett, MD,
Pelican Communications**

Among the many lessons associations have learned from the pandemic, the importance of communications is one of the most valuable.

As coronavirus took hold and lockdown began to bite, associations became the 'go-to' source of news, guidance and reassurance for many members. Associations were in an unprecedented position of having open access to government departments and officials, with weekly and sometimes daily briefings on policy and crisis management.

Communicating the latest news and advice to members has been a vital service and has highlighted the value membership organisations provide to members.

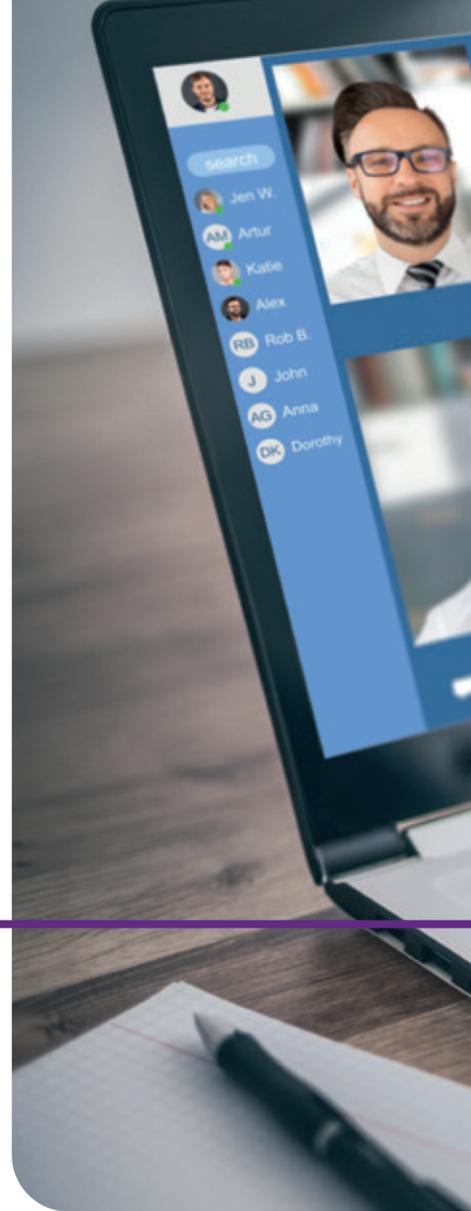
Whilst most associations have always provided updates and member news to their community, the value members have placed on the COVID-19 information, has led many to reassess the value a co-ordinated comms campaign has in retaining and recruiting members. So, it's not surprising to learn

from our research that 89% of associations are planning to use direct communications with members to promote membership benefits.

Many respondents have reported that their comms teams have never been busier. And in the absence of face-to-face events, many trade bodies have dipped their toes into digital comms, whilst others have pressed the accelerator on a digital transformation that was already underway.

At Pelican we have seen several clients move traditional print communications online, engage more fully with social media platforms and replace seminars with webinars. On the whole this transformation has been welcomed by members and it should encourage more associations to make the change. The key to success is to ensure you have the right comms and digital expertise within your team or that you have access to this support from your marketing and PR advisors.

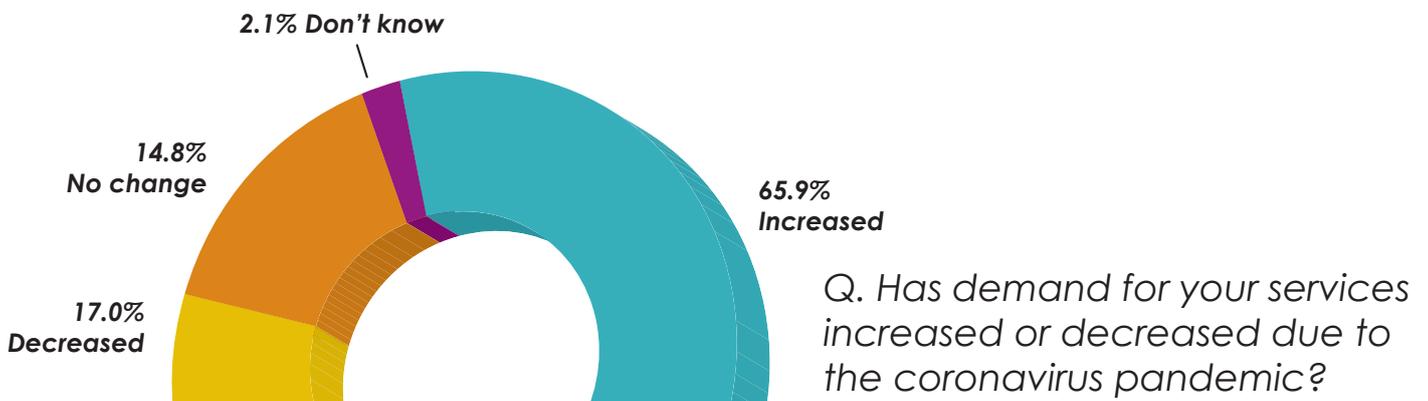
Another area where effective communications has elevated the value of membership is promoting or





defending an industry during the pandemic. Many bodies have done a great job representing members interests. Memorable campaigns include the Horticultural Trades Association's successful efforts to reopen garden centres and the UK Chamber of Shipping's efforts to highlight the importance of sea freight to keeping the nation fed. Another effective campaign, and one I was involved with, was the British Frozen Food Federation's initiative to unite producers of food for the catering and hospitality trade to find new outlets and avoid thousands of tonnes of food going to waste as a result of the shutdown of pubs and restaurants.

The result of all this is that savvy associations have recognised that good communications is more than a 'nice to have', it's a vital tool in retaining and recruiting members and in demonstrating the value a membership body delivers to its community.



Member services

Demand for association and membership body services has risen significantly, with 66% saying they have experienced an increase and only 17% reporting a decrease. Members and non-members alike have seen the relaying of news and information as the most important service provided by associations throughout lockdown. Sector-specific business support, such as interpreting government COVID-19 guidelines, was seen as the most valued reason to engage. Webinars and regular member briefings have been the most common form of engagement but 83% said they have also experienced a greater level of inbound calls and emails. Having all staff working remotely has provided

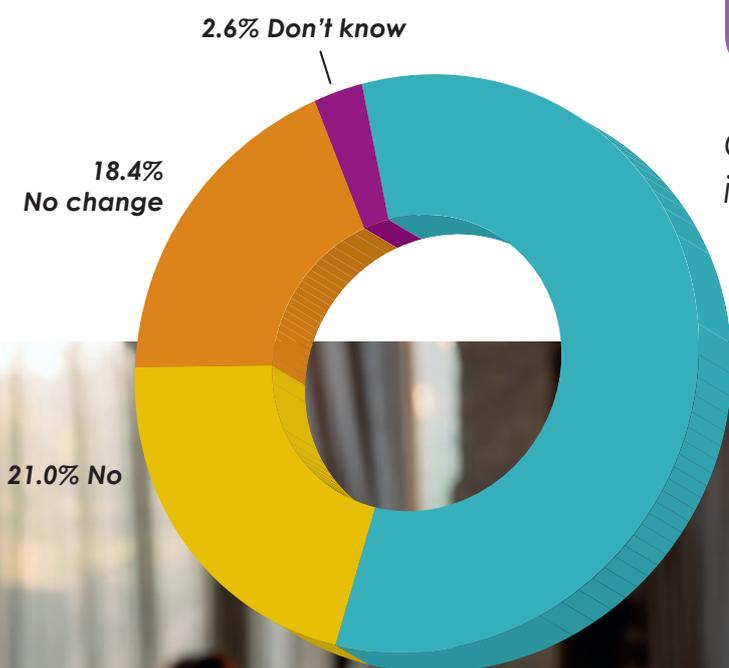
some challenges for phone calls, but this was mostly in the initial stages and most have put systems into place to route calls accordingly.

Online platforms and technology have come into their own during this pandemic, particularly the likes of Zoom and Microsoft Teams which dominated our survey responses. Zoom was the most used medium of member communication and engagement with 62% respondents using it, followed by Microsoft Teams (26%). Some organisations, like the BDA, have also used Slack very effectively.

Forums and WhatsApp groups have had greater engagement, or been started, as a result of the pandemic and 82% of respondents reported a rise in web traffic, some as significant as 300%. 80% said they would be reviewing their member communities plan as a direct result of this.

Education is a key component for many associations and particularly for professional bodies. 58% have seen a rise in demand for education services. This is not only for established organisations offering education, but for those offering webinars for the first time.

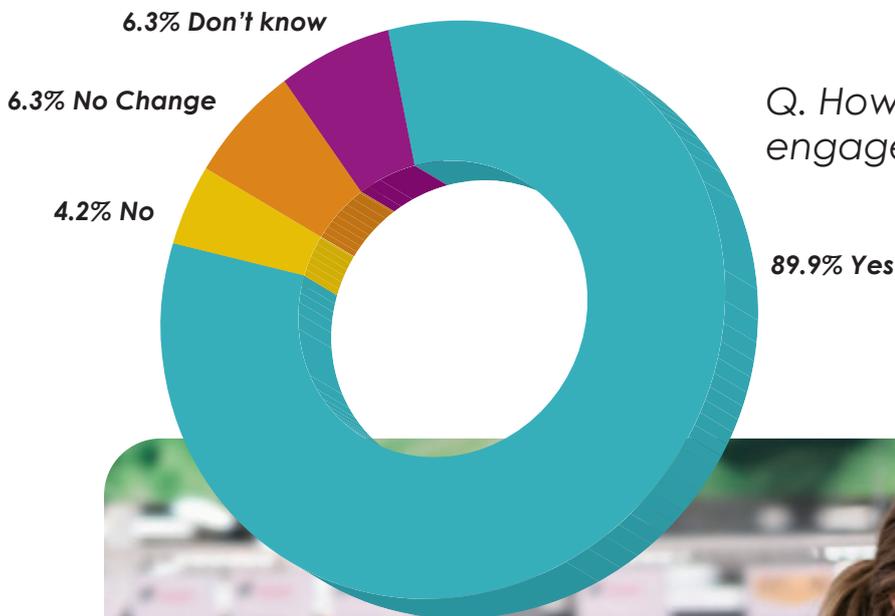
- 96% started or increased usage of online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom.
- 46% said the greatest need from members was sector-specific guidelines.
- 83% report seeing greater web traffic during lockdown.
- 84% said they received more inbound emails and calls throughout the lockdown period.
- 82% have noticed more engagement across their social media platforms.
- There has been a sharp rise in demand for education.



Q. More interest in education?

57.8% Yes





Q. How have you seen member engagement change?



- Executive director of The Institute of Sales Management, Roger Bradburn, said: "It's been so busy. Activity has increased fourfold and people have been signing up to our education programmes. In fact, we have had to take people on to cope with it. Personal development interest is far greater outside the UK – we actually had an enquiry to run some training from an Ethiopian Brewery."
- The 28,000 strong Chartered Institute of Marketing has seen a drop in training funded by employers, but more individuals realise the value of education as part of their career development. Qualifications are still the largest part of what the Institute offers. It runs a training centre at its headquarters, but had to move a number of courses online very quickly. CEO Chris Daly said: "The Institute had been thinking about remote examinations for 11 years and now it's been done in a matter of weeks."
- The Data & Marketing Association managed to get a grant to run a home-learning course for those furloughed in the sector and booked more than 475 onto a 1-day diploma training course. CEO Chris Combemale said: "Not only was this a great idea, it will provide us with so much feedback for the full programme."
- The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) was reluctant to move education programmes online because it was felt this could cannibalise physical events which were more profitable. However, it has been able to create more content in 6 weeks than the previous 6 months, according to CEO Alastair McCapra.

- As people began to spend time in their gardens, The Garden Manufacturers Association needed to provide support for members faced with pivoting more of their business online. The association helped members with information for factories on social distancing given the demands for the garden products was considerable. They too lobbied through government, partnering with the Horticultural Trades Association which represents many of the growers who were hugely affected by the closure of garden centres. The organisation ended up providing a highly valued sourcing service for retailers.
- The Greeting Card Association helped members sell more products online through a series of webinars. When members were left with excess stocks, the association invited them to give away cards to those in care homes, launching a campaign called 'Thinking of You' which was originally planned for October to March.
- The British Independent Retailers Association (BIRA) has had a potentially major impact on its membership services. BIRA operates its own bank; the smallest in the UK and a buying group for its members. CEO, Andrew Goodacre said: "We had several requests for repayment holidays for the bank given 80% of our members were closed and only 20% of them were in essential retail. It was a week before members pay for their stock in February. We feared the worst in terms of membership. We launched a promotion for three months free and now we've got more members than we've lost."
- The BPMA (British Promotional Merchandise Association) is planning a new conference (originally an exhibition) in September, for supplier members to present and exhibit live in their factory showrooms, giving greater exposure than would be possible at a normal trade show.



The Institute had been thinking about remote examinations for 11 years and now it's been done in a matter of weeks."

Chris Daly, CEO,
Chartered Institute of Marketing

66% said demand for membership services has increased.

Impact on memberships

The impact on membership has been varied. Organisations with an annual renewal in January have been largely unaffected. 51% of respondents renew in the same month each year and 49% renew on a rolling basis. What's particularly interesting is 47% said they had seen a rise in membership as a result of the pandemic.

For example, the recently merged National Registered Landlords Association has seen an increase of 20-30%, with 1,200 new members joining in March alone.

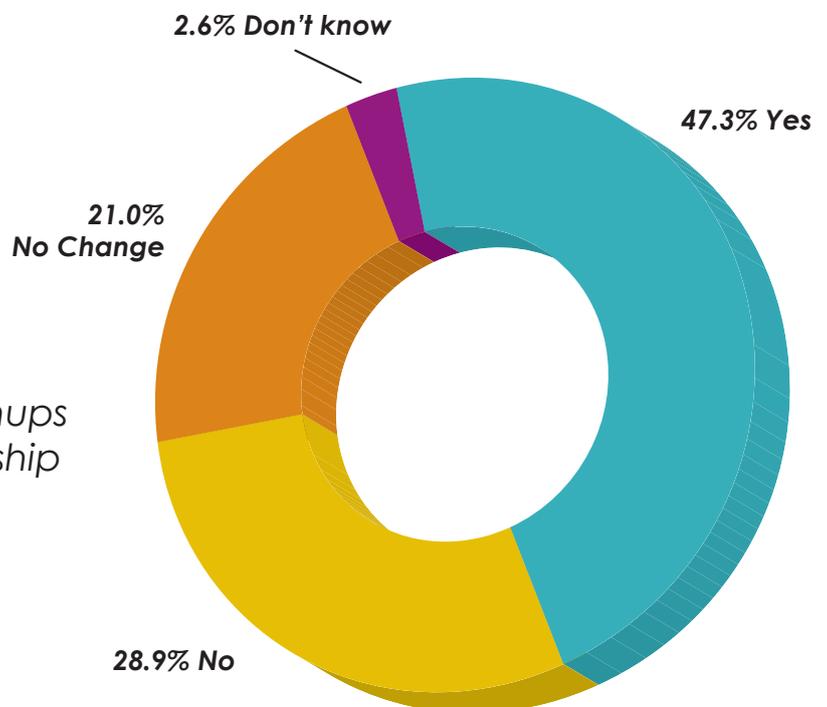
Just over 40% of respondents said they would delay or reduce membership payments as a result of the pandemic, but they largely represent the sectors most affected. The British Promotional Merchandise Association, members of which have been hit hard by the pandemic, made the decision to allow a payment break until September.

For the majority of associations, membership revenue accounts for more than half of total revenue. Just over 42% are slightly pessimistic about their membership renewals, with just 9% being very optimistic.

It's perhaps unsurprising then that, post-lockdown, more than 71% will focus on campaigns to retain and engage members and a further 71% will review member benefits programmes to reflect the changing relevance of what they offer.

In order to promote the benefits of membership, the majority of respondents (89%) said they will increase direct member communications and 56% intend to increase marketing activity and spend.

Q. More signups for membership



Post-lockdown, more than 71% will focus on campaigns to retain and engage members.

CAUTION

**MAINTAIN
SOCIAL
DISTANCING**

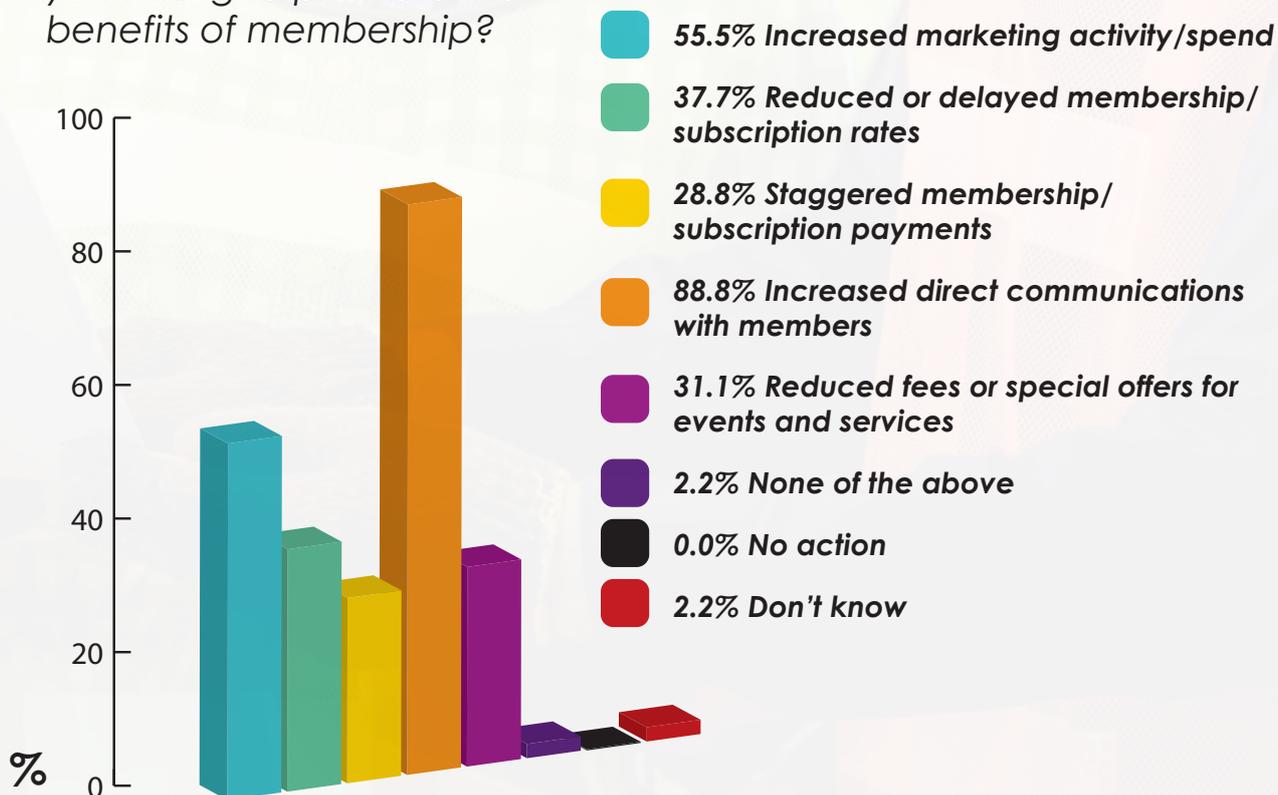


DISTANCE FROM OTHERS

- Members of the Association of Contract Manufacturing Packaging, Fulfilment and Logistics, have seen record growth. The trade body generates leads for its members through a portal and has had 250 million requests for hand sanitisers. As a result membership has risen by 20 during the lockdown. CEO Rodney Steel said: "Normally we would do a site visit but that's not been possible so we did the audit questions on Zoom. Also some members we've been trying to win over came on board straight away because of the hand sanitiser opportunities."
- The British Dietetics Association would normally see a 3-4% increase a year, but is currently seeing double this, according to CEO Andy Burman. He said: "This is particularly impressive given that some parts of the membership have had income drops, like specialists in sport."
- Chris Ratcliffe from Boccia said: "Members need information in a crisis. Online events and webinars have allowed more members to access content. Non-members want the information we are giving out so are joining up."
- Caan Walls is head of membership at the British Library. Its offering is very event-focused, with members paying for exclusive access to events. For that reason they don't engage much online. Walls said: "The priority for us right now is focused on retention and keeping our members engaged with exclusive content. Membership has dropped enough for us to need to do something about it. We are going to survey our members with a proposal for our new membership offering."
- The British Dental Industry Association CEO, Edmund Proffitt, commented: "We have had the best Q1 as an industry in 15 years only to be followed by the worst as our industry almost came to a halt. However, 60% of the subscriptions were in by January. We will not chase those that haven't paid until September and support them where we can. Despite challenges the association has made some successful representation via the UK Med Tech Forum and seen tremendous member engagement."
- Richard Harrow, CEO of the British Frozen Foods Federation managed to get its annual conference in just two weeks before lockdown. However, many of the BFFF members are connected to foodservice supplying the restaurant trade, which has been hugely affected by the temporary closure of the market. There has been a loss of members as a result. Harrow said: "All CEOs have had to reforecast the entire year but also look at scenarios of membership and event impact. The BFFF lost two events in May and June but have been hugely active in communicating to members and working with the Food & Drink Federation, as well as linking with a number of other associations."
- The UK Warehousing Association, which has 800 members, has an annual renewal in April. CEO Peter Ward said: "We have had 14 resignations, but 30 new members. One of the things the association did was to create an emergency warehousing space register. The supply chain was being impacted due to many retail places not being open and therefore not able to take stock, yet shipments were still coming in from overseas. Members loved it and saw it as a great way to promote their services."
- The Twins Trust has an individual membership scheme with 19,500 members. Half its income comes from membership. Head of membership and courses, Emma Collins, said: "One of the challenges is members couldn't access some of the midwife appointments and we had to set up crisis support services. The membership is paying for these services so we've had to redefine the membership offering." The charity would also usually generate financial support from events such as the London Marathon which were cancelled. The government did create a £750m grant for charities but that wouldn't have supported every charity. The charity is now reviewing its long-term strategy.
- The Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys, which represent 4,000 members, says it was still seeing growth of 5-7% in the pandemic, but its high retention rate of 97% in January marginally dropped in May.



Q. What steps (if any) are you taking to promote the benefits of membership?



Events and conferences

Conferences and events have been a major casualty of the pandemic for membership organisations, however the impact has largely been driven by the timing of the events.

The British Frozen Foods Federation had its major conference on 5 March 2020 with marginal dropouts, but those organisations that had later events planned had to cancel or postpone. Some took the decision to move their events online.

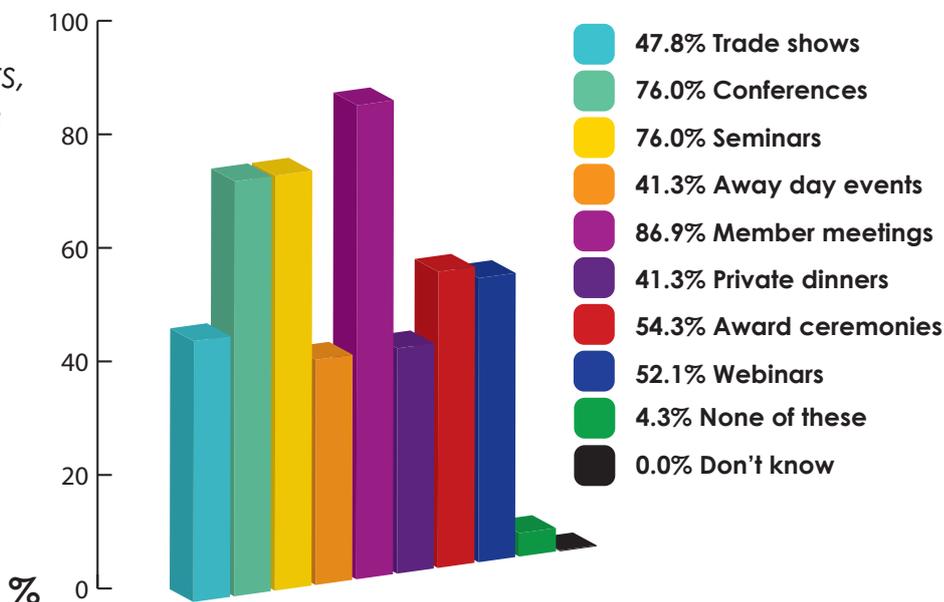
Indeed, online meetings have rocketed, with 92% saying they had greater interest as a result of the new virtual format. 84% of respondents have run virtual events since lockdown; 50% said they substituted an existing event and 42% ran a new event. AGMs and board meetings have never had such great turnouts, but one of the challenges is there has been a different perspective from audiences as to the value of an online event compared to a physical one. Some delegates seem to prefer the convenience of meeting online, while others drop out of events.

While there is not the same level of cost in terms of venue and catering requirements, it shouldn't be underestimated how much planning is required for an online conference with breakouts and speaker engagement panels. Many organisations are seeking out providers in this space and some platforms are quite expensive.

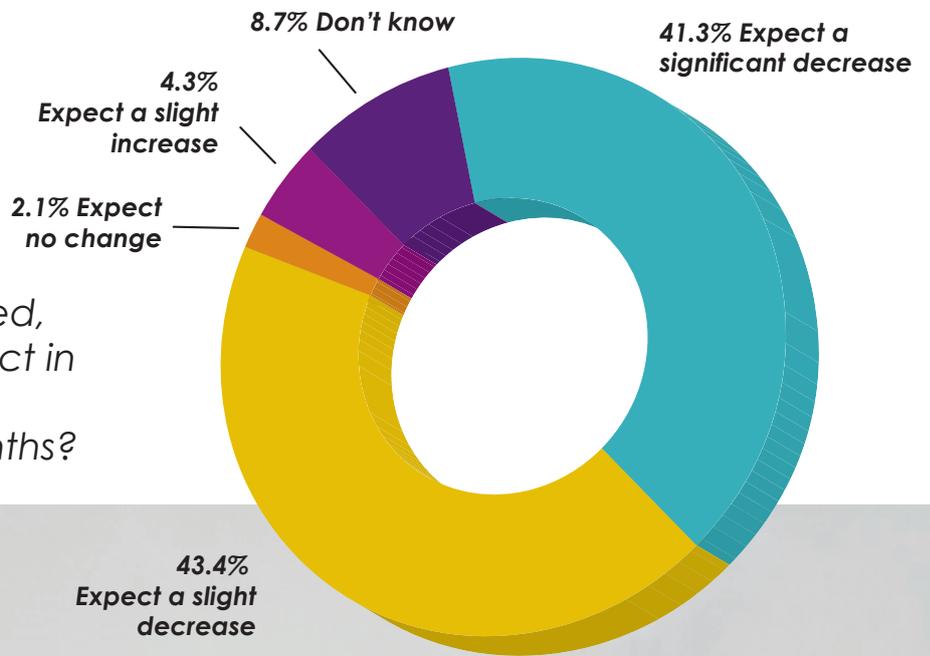
■ Carey Trevill, CEO of the British Promotional Merchandise Association, is planning a new online conference and exhibition. She said: "One of the exciting and new dynamics was to give suppliers an opportunity to promote themselves direct from the factory floor or supplier showrooms."

Monetising online events is harder because there has been a perception in the past that they should be free. Of those that have run online events during lockdown, only 27% said they charged while 71% did not.

Q.What events, if any, did you run in 2019?



Q. Once restrictions are lifted, do you anticipate an impact in attendance figures at your events in the next 9-12 months?



Those offering physical events have been affected and 70% say they have suffered decreased revenue as a result.



Monetising online events is harder because there has been a perception in the past that they should be free.

Our survey showed that where people had switched their proposed live event to online, 88% had charged less and sponsorship was either lowered or not charged at all.

- The League of Angels, a business network and high value investor club, hosts up to 30 events per year in prestigious locations. CEO Barney Battles postponed the renewal fee until 2021 on the basis they were not comfortable about putting on physical events in the near future.
- Exhibitions are also a major part of revenue for associations. One organisation said the loss of its EXPO had reduced profit by £150,000, causing a significant loss this year which it was just about able to cover via reserves. Aside from taking out a loan, there has been no support available to help this trade association cope with the revenue impact.

- Chris Combemale, CEO of the Data and Marketing Association, has planned an awards event in December and is hopeful it will still go ahead. He is watching with interest their Australian counterpart who is running an online awards event where winners will be presented their awards at the agency head office and seeking to have them delivered through a partnership with Uber.
- The Meetings and Design Institute, a European organisation that helps meeting planners and those supporting the industry, saw a huge increase in interest on how to use Zoom for online meetings and conferences. CEO Maarten Vanneste, said: "We've all entered this technology at the same time and so we've had to learn on the job and people are nervous because it's new. We've all had to become cameramen, lighting specialists and learn how to engage in meetings. One of the MDI initiatives was to create a marketplace event where the member suppliers hosted a 10-minute presentation in a Zoom room. The suppliers then rotated from room to room." Vanneste says they had great feedback from members and meeting planners.



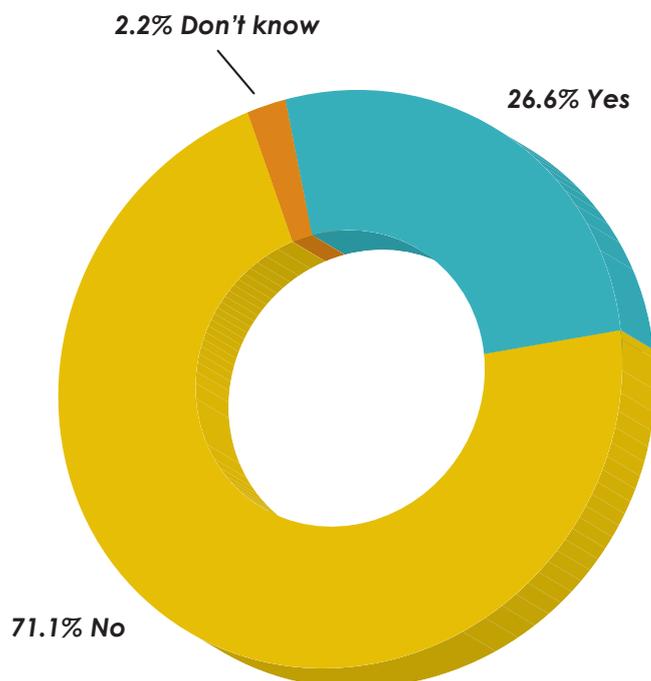
We've all entered this technology at the same time and so we've had to learn on the job and people are nervous because it's new. We've all had to become cameramen, lighting specialists and learn how to engage in meetings.

Maarten Vanneste, CEO,
Meetings and Design Institute

The mood within the association world is that it will take some time before physical events return, certainly while there are concerns around visitor safety and speaker attendance. 41% of our survey respondents expect a significant decrease in attendees at physical events over the next 12 months. Established speakers however have been in high demand for online events, and of course are more available because they are not flying around the world.

Other events impacted by coronavirus were annual golf days and award ceremonies, some of which were not able to be replicated online. Many of the venues that hold association events have been supportive in allowing organisations to postpone until a later date, but while that minimises costs, significant revenue opportunities have been lost.

Q. Have you charged delegates for any virtual events?





Publications

Organisations that produce printed publications have been affected with many opting to go online, a trend that was starting to happen prior to the pandemic. As lockdown has gone on and people spend more time working remotely, magazines that would have been delivered to offices have lost impact, and consequently, advertising revenue.

However, the UK Warehousing Association, which publishes a bi-monthly magazine that appears both in print and online, assumed the magazine would automatically switch to an online-only version. But advertisers, who are essential to the publication's viability, were keen to keep the print option.

This seems to suggest that in some industries there may still be a future for printed publications which run alongside online versions, however there is no question print is in the minority now.



Effectiveness of print channel increases during COVID crisis

Andrew Pearce, sales & marketing director, Synergy

During lockdown our media habits were forced to change and much coverage has been given to the changes across digital and broadcast channels. But latest industry data shows that, with people spending more time at home, consumers have had more exposure to printed marketing materials, increasing its ability to drive engagement and sales.

During Q2 the average piece of direct mail was interacted with 4.58 times, an 11% increase year-on-year. Door drops also achieved record levels of consumer engagement, with the average item interacted with 3.19 times, which represents 15% growth year-on-year.

Business mail, essentially addressed mail that contains some form of bill or statement, also reported higher interaction figures, up 7% to 4.87 times.

These channels also recorded significant increases in the amount of time they remain in the home, with all three effectively extending their life-span by a day year-on-year: DM 8.5 days; door drops 6.9 days and business mail 9.6 days.

So, whether you are planning your next membership welcome pack, or donor acquisition campaign it is definitely worth including mail in your campaign planning.

Employee welfare and working from home

According to a survey conducted by HR software provider Breathe in conjunction with Posture People and HR Central, 88% of people are worried about using public transport to commute easy decision to make. Given this statistic it has been an easy decision to allow employees to work from home.

Enabling this has been a major achievement for many in the sector. Faced with the challenges of isolation, home schooling, multiple residents being online at the same time, partners facing illness or redundancy and increased workload, the sector has managed to work extremely well. In fact, the level of staff engagement has been higher, with chief executives saying they wouldn't previously have been able to talk to entire teams at once, but now technology has made this possible. It is also easier to communicate what the association is doing to employees.

Some organisations have expressed concerns around data and potential breaches, particularly in relation to sharing personal data. The Data & Marketing Association was in regular communications with government and the Information Commission Office in relation to advice in this area.

Whilst some employers were worried in the past about flexible home working and being able to manage projects effectively, actually the reverse has happened. Productivity levels have been extremely high, helped by the sense we are 'in this together' and need to support each other. A number of companies have noted that staff being able to work in their own environment without distractions has been hugely beneficial. Where employees have not coped so well, employers have offered counselling services and 16% have set up an employee wellness programme.

Stephen Woodford, CEO of the Advertising Association compared the number of meetings he would have attended pre-lockdown to now. Previously it was 16 and now it is 30. There is also a greater appreciation of what colleagues do. He said: "We know more about people now than we did when they were sat next to us at their desks because we get to see everyone's outputs."

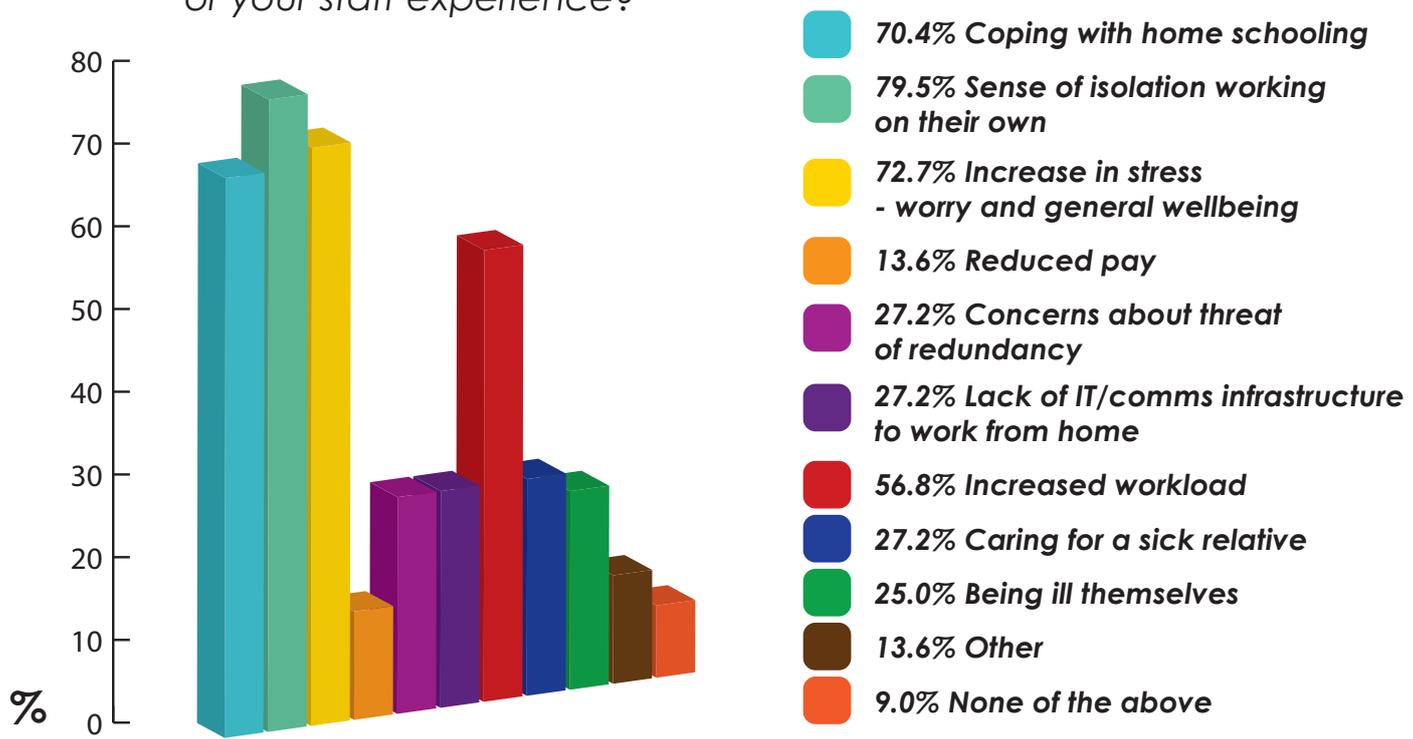




87% say they will increase flexible working as a result of COVID-19.

80% said isolation was an issue for staff working from home and 72% reported stress-related problems.

Q. What issues did you or your staff experience?



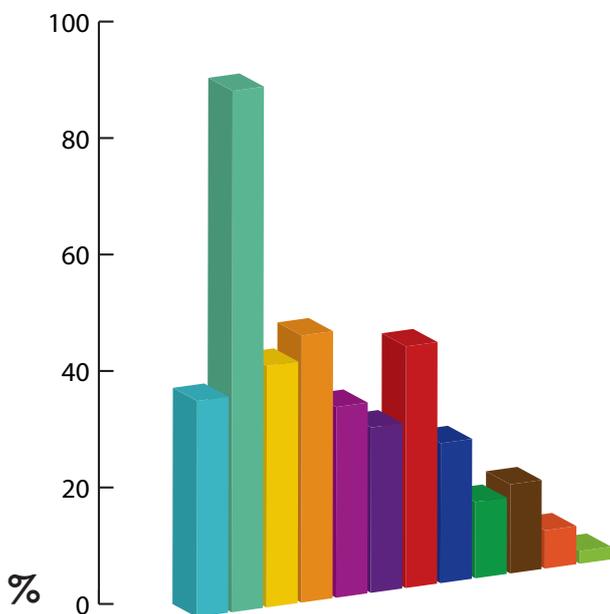
The downside of having constant access to work emails and platforms such as Zoom, is too much focus on PC time, and employers have been conscious of ensuring their teams take adequate breaks and exercise.

- Chris Combemale from the DMA, said he wanted to lead by example and take two hours out in the middle of the day: "I structured my diary so I could start early and finish later, allowing for a longer break in the middle of the day."
- Ben Beadle from the National Residential Landlords association talked about creating a Family First policy and the importance of using regular anonymous surveys on employee wellbeing, as well as allowing contributions for new ideas. He uses a platform called Peakon but there are others in the marketplace, many of which have seen a rise in usage.
- Adrian Christy, CEO of Badminton England, said if the team wanted to they could work at different times of the day to accommodate home schooling.
- In terms of returning to work, organisations have put social distancing measures in place to ensure staff are safe and following government guidelines. 39% of respondents have operated an alternate office days policy to allow staff to break up the week and have some colleague contact, however 93% are continuing to work from home.
- The Chartered Institute of Public Relations and the Branded Content Marketing Association have now made the decision to not renew their office locations and permanently work from home but with the opportunity to come to London once a month for get-togethers and team meetings.
- One association has saved £70,000 a year by moving to a smaller Regus London office.
- 40% of companies have written new staff employment policies to cater for the changing environments at home and in the newly created self-distancing work environment. 34% have provided facemasks and hand sanitisers and 43% have implemented new cleaning regimes, while 43% have increased signage to make sure rules around social distancing are clearly shown and observed.





Q. What workplace measures have you put into place for social distancing?



- 38.6% *Alternative office days for staff*
- 93.1% *We are continuing working from home*
- 43.1% *Signage to remind staff of the rules*
- 47.7% *Created new policies for workplace social distancing*
- 34.0% *Offering free facemasks / other PPE / sanitizer*
- 29.5% *Assigning members of staff to manage this process*
- 43.1% *Increased cleaning regime*
- 25.0% *Regular weekly meetings to share concerns about health and safety*
- 13.6% *Addressed holiday pay*
- 15.9% *Set up a mental wellness programme*
- 6.8% *Other*
- 2.2% *None of the above*

Keeping teams motivated

There have been all sorts of ways in which organisations have tried to keep teams motivated. These have included Monday stand up meetings, yoga, wine tastings, baking, Friday night get-togethers and quizzes.

- CIM ran a 'whose desk is it' quiz and Fitness Tuesdays.
- The Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys organised its own version of the TV show Taskmaster.
- One Zoom meeting at Property Mark featured a magician which proved popular.

Lockdown has been a time when it's okay to make mistakes and try out new technology, when everyone from the CEO to junior staff members have faced the same challenges, when everyone has dressed more casually and gotten a peek into their colleagues homes and lives. This has created a level of transparency and authenticity that may not have been achieved without the pandemic.

Second spike and safety concerns

One of the major challenges facing associations and society as a whole is a potential second wave of COVID-19 at the end of 2020. Until then, for many sectors, it's going to be very difficult. Whilst organisations will take precautions to ensure their staff are safe, member events may not be at the scale we have traditionally experienced.

- Adrian Christy, CEO of Badminton England, says a second wave of COVID-19 that runs into the first part of 2021 could spell catastrophe for the sport: "It's the biggest participation sport in the UK. We have adjusted all our budgets and just got through this year, but a massive chunk of grass root sport and volunteers would just give up. The organisation would be a fraction of the size it is today. Very few things keep me awake at night, but what our sport will look like on our return does."



The future

For association and membership leaders the future is uncertain; the way they work and manage operations will never be the same again. We have moved forward in the digital space by at least 10 years, albeit at a cost, this year. Flexible working will be the norm and every business is reforecasting and revisiting their strategies. But that isn't a bad thing.

Some organisations are looking to scale their brands, particularly through licensing their education programmes or creating association chapters. It's clear that increased provision of education, member communications and online events will be key drivers for associations revenue growth. Where there are education services that can be scaled, now could be the time to extend the reach of online courses to a more global audience.

COVID-19 has made us all think about global opportunities and given us valuable insights into what members really want and how they interact with membership communities.

91% of our respondents say they will be reviewing their business continuity strategy. Whether the traditional fixed-fee membership model prevails remains to be seen. Evidence suggests there could be a growing appetite for pay-as-you-go membership or a more flexible offering. Messaging and delivery of that has never been more prominent.

One charity said: "We have really focused on our messaging to our members to remind them their subscription does give them benefits, but also supports them as a charity."

Membership bodies, charities and trade associations will continue to play a larger part in defining government policy. Federations or groups of associations, who in the past may have been competitive, have combined effort to create greater impact.

All in all this extraordinary time has been a wake-up call for associations to be totally member centric.



91% said they would be revisiting their business continuity strategy.



Gordon Glenister, Membershipworld

www.membershipworld.co.uk

Gordon Glenister is an expert in the membership community, having formally been director general of a trade association for more than 11 years. Gordon is also a facilitator and speaker at many association events and recently launched a membership community site for the podcast he now presents called Membershipworld. Gordon is well known in the influencer marketing industry and launched the first association division for influencers, agencies and platforms under the Branded Content Marketing Association.



Pelican Communications

www.pelicancommunications.co.uk

Pelican is a PR & marketing communications agency specialising in the food supply chain and environmental sectors. Working nationally and internationally, the team is made up of marketing and public relations professionals, former journalists, social media specialists, team development consultants and graphic designers. Each is an expert in their field, who over the course of their careers have advised many leading organisations.





Synergy

www.synergy-print.co.uk

For more than 20 years Synergy has been helping membership organisations and charities reach out to members, donors, visitors, supporters and volunteers in a way that makes them feel valued, appreciated and compelled to stick around. We understand your challenges; how you need to maximise your precious funding; how it is essential for you to retain, develop and grow your membership, donors, visitors, supporters and volunteering teams and how it is essential for you to look for new ways to generate income for your organisation.

synergy



OPEN

PLEASE, KEEP SOCIAL DISTANCE
AND USE FACE MASK

