

The American Legion Media & Communications Commission

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The American Legion Media & Communications Commission oversees the majority of print and digital media products and services delivered from National Headquarters, including the monthly magazine, website, podcast, social media channels, e-newsletters, documents, physical displays and more. The commission also supervises portions of the organization's media outreach program, including news releases, press conferences, speeches, appearances in external media and more. Division staff members are also called upon to assist leadership in specific special projects.

In addition to fulfilling obligations for dozens of print and digital media products as well as media queries, Media & Communications staff members are called upon by the commission to promote initiatives of the national commander, volunteer leadership, American Legion departments and other National Headquarters areas. Resolutions passed by the American Legion National Executive Committee and national convention are also converted into media elements to inform the organization's various audiences. The Media & Communications Commission also supports and helps coordinate marketing initiatives, charitable giving outreach and corporate relationships.

The flagship of the media program is *The American Legion Magazine*, the nation's best-read and most widely circulated veterans magazine, according to an independent audit. With a circulation of about 1.6 million households and a monthly readership exceeding 3 million, *The American Legion Magazine* ranks No. 1 in readership frequency according to independent researcher GfK MRI. That means subscribers have read three out of the last four issues more often than readers of the other nearly 200 U.S. magazines surveyed. Its content is general interest, driven by the organization's main areas of engagement – patriotism, defense, veterans, children and youth, national and international affairs.

The Media & Communications program draws most of its revenue from advertising sales into the magazine while additional revenue comes from the website, e-newsletters, the monthly *Dispatch* leadership publication and other media products. A \$3-per-member allocation also offsets a portion of the magazine's production and distribution.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of effects have presented challenges for *The American Legion Magazine* in particular, along with opportunities to grow in other media developments. Supply-chain

breakdowns have affected the magazine's production costs and has shifted the advertising mix. The cost of paper for the magazine has risen by 30% over the last year, and the cost of postage has increased 18%. Also, many advertisers that had previously marketed mail-order products have drawn back since the pandemic began, largely due to inability to fulfill orders caused by labor shortages and supply-chain breakdowns. The magazine, the website, social media channels and other platforms, meanwhile, have continued to deliver the message of the organization's advocacy, youth support, community service and patriotic activities and more through the pandemic and economic uncertainty of the time.

The American Legion Media & Communications Commission's primary responsibilities include:

- **Print.** This category includes *The American Legion Magazine*; *The American Legion Dispatch* (monthly leadership newsletter); *The American Legion Annual Report*; *The American Legion National Convention Guide*; the National Commander's Testimony to Congress; brochures and internal documents and additional print media as assigned from national leadership, including event programs; and other specialty products. Additionally, the division fulfills editing and design needs of more than 200 brochures and documents.
- **Web.** The American Legion national website at www.legion.org is the nation's most-visited veterans service organization website and serves as a gateway to virtually all American Legion media products and channels, receiving more than 1.5 million page views per month and growing. The website offers news, videos and photography; entry points for transactional engagement through donations, membership and merchandising; entrance to special-interest microsites such as Legiontown, where veterans and family members are invited to create and share their own content; and the American Legion Basic Training module. Legion.org is also the gateway to the organization's interactive and transactional platform supporting American Legion Baseball. The American Legion's video portfolio, called LegionTV, houses the organization's current video content in one microsite.
- **E-mail.** The commission oversees delivery of a portfolio of popular e-newsletters, led by the weekly American Legion Online Update, which reaches nearly 800,000 subscribers every Thursday with links to the top stories of the week on the Legion.org platform. In 2022 the national e-newsletter frequency increased, adding a Monday Briefing (nearly 770,000 distribution) and a Wednesday Briefing (more than 790,000 distribution). The increased frequency has improved open rates, click-through rates and website visitation, all of which exceed industry standards. Other e-newsletters include Dispatch, Flag Alerts, The American Legion Riders, The American Legion Baseball Dugout and Tango Alpha Lima.
- **Social.** The American Legion has a fast-growing network of social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram. The American Legion's Facebook community is a little over 173,000 followers, and the national Twitter following has more than 114,000 followers. The Legion's Instagram following has grown to more than 15,000, and

LinkedIn followers number more than 34,000.

- **Podcast.** The American Legion's Tango Alpha Lima podcast surged in popularity in August and September 2021 through a special series of firsthand accounts from the 9/11 terrorist attacks and their aftermath. Back-to-back record-breaking download months in August and September led to a total of more than 100,000 downloads by January 2022. The podcast features hosts who are American Legion members and post-9/11 veterans. Weekly episodes typically alternate between a roundtable discussion covering issues of interest to the military community by the co-hosts to interviews with featured guests, along with scheduled special episodes addressing timely topics, such as career transitions or veteran suicide prevention.
- **Smartphone apps:** The American Legion Media & Communications Division has produced and developed a portfolio of smartphone mobile apps, including a general American Legion app introduced in 2014 that has generated more than 66,000 downloads; an American Legion World Series app, which has been downloaded more than 15,000 times; an annual National Convention app; and a Sons of The American Legion app.
- **Media outreach.** The commission oversees Media & Communications staff support for promoting the organization's programs, messages and priorities to outside media and key stakeholders. This includes the writing, editing and distribution of press releases; regular engagement with national broadcast, print and web media producers; twice-annual radio show tours by the national commander; the development and delivery of media events and press conferences; timely alerts; and audience measurement.
- **Training:** Staff members provide media training to volunteer leadership as well as post members in support of the American Legion Media Alliance (TALMA). Each year, the national volunteer leadership team is also briefed on media engagement. The media team conducts regular training sessions and workshops. The commission chairman appoints three members of the commission or council to guide TALMA members and programs so they can efficiently and effectively promote the Legion in their communities. Membership in TALMA now exceeds 300.
- **Supporting posts, departments:** The commission directs staff members to work with American Legion departments and posts to promote various events, especially those that connect with a national priority, such as veteran suicide prevention. For example, when the coronavirus pandemic hit, the commission reworked the Buddy Check kit to make it relevant and timely for the circumstances at hand. American Legion posts embraced the change and used the kit as a resource to reach out to veterans in need in their communities. Other media kits, resource information, videos, posters, flyers, press releases and additional materials have been designed and distributed for departments, districts and posts to use in order to generate awareness of programs like the American Legion Legacy Scholarship.

- **Physical.** The American Legion Media & Communications Commission directs staff to produce a variety of physical displays, including parade floats, plaques, billboard designs, convention booths, banners, posters and other forms of physical media for the organization.

The goal of this integrated approach to American Legion media is to maximize efficiencies, resources and talents to deliver the organization's message in a well-branded, effective strategy that aims to improve internal and external awareness, generate membership, inform visitors, stimulate interactions and ease transactions.

Overall, the media and communications program is built to replicate and represent the values and interests of The American Legion, from the individual member to the local post to the state department to the national headquarters, internal and external, and beyond.



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