ANALYSIS

Engagement is Shifting from **Communication to Confidence**

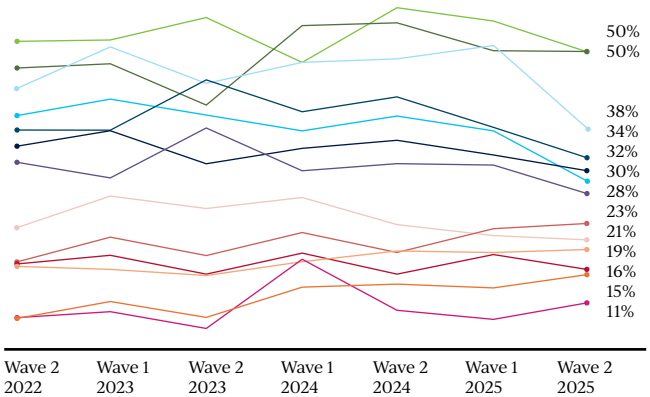
ALANA DEVITT

The next phase of member engagement will not be won on returns or communications volume. CoreData research shows members want confidence and practical guidance, and the funds that deliver it at key life moments stand to gain the most. And even though fewer members switched funds in 2025, one in four say they still might. The retention battle has not been won, it has simply become less visible.

THE NEXT PHASE of member engagement will be won on confidence, not communication volume. For super funds, it will not be achieved by sending more messages, launching another feature in the app, or pointing to stronger market returns. The real challenge now is more practical and more demanding, turning passive members into confident ones with clear outcomes.

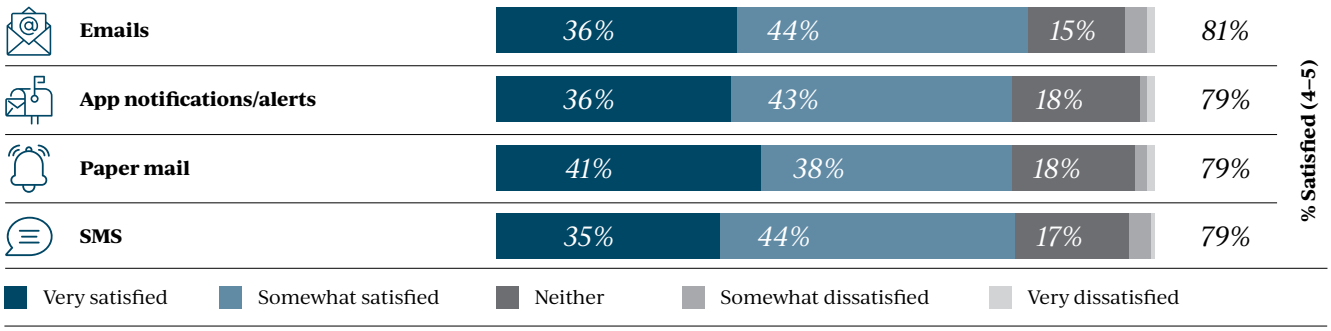
That distinction matters. Stability in super does not always reflect commitment; often, it reflects inertia. Members may not be actively dissatisfied with their fund, but nor are they deeply attached to it. They stay because the category remains low attention, not because their provider has become indispensable. This is the strategic challenge now emerging for funds: engagement is no longer primarily a communications issue. It is a confidence issue. The funds that outperform over the next few years are likely to be those that reduce uncertainty, simplify choices, and make members feel more in control at the moments that matter.

The CoreData member engagement research suggests the sector is moving into a more mature phase of engagement. Self-service has normalised. Digital channels matter more than ever. But service moments still carry disproportionate weight, particularly when something goes wrong or requires explanation. Members are increasingly expecting guidance rather than information – not more material for the sake of it but help that makes complex decisions easier to navigate. Reach still matters, but reach on its own is no longer enough.



Satisfaction with member communications by channel

(Among those who have read communications from main fund)



LOWER SWITCHING DOES NOT MEAN THE RETENTION JOB IS DONE

The proportion of members who said they had switched super funds in the past two years fell to 8 per cent in 2025, down from 11 per cent in 2023 and 12 per cent in 2024. But the most commercially important segment is not necessarily the member already halfway out the door. It is the much larger group that is merely persuadable – members who are not dissatisfied enough to move now, but not loyal enough to dismiss alternatives later. A member does not need to be angry to leave; they simply need to encounter a moment where another option appears clearer, more relevant or easier to use.

The data also reinforces what members say they care about most when choosing a fund. In the latest wave, value for money and trustworthiness were each nominated by 50 per cent of members, significantly ahead of stable and reputable at 38 per cent, competitive price at 34 per cent and competitive investment performance at 30 per cent. That is a notable result for any fund still assuming strong returns alone will carry the relationship. Investment performance matters, but members are telling funds, quite clearly, that the broader value equation and the credibility of the provider weigh more heavily in decision-making.

TRUST IS RISING, ADVOCACY REMAINS HARDER WON

There is real progress in member sentiment measures. Satisfaction with service quality improved from 74 per cent in 2023 to 77 per cent in 2025. Strong association with trustworthiness climbed from 74 per cent to 77 per cent this year. Value-for-money association also rose steadily. But actual churn and switching intent are not the same thing, and the gap between them is where the commercial risk sits. The proportion of members who say they are likely to switch to another super fund has barely moved over the past three years: 26 per cent in 2023 and 25 per cent in both 2024 and 2025. Likelihood of switching to a self-managed super fund (SMSF) has also remained consistently high, at 23 per cent, 25 per cent and 24 per cent respectively.

In other words, fewer people may have acted, but the reservoir of members open to leaving has not meaningfully shrunk. The battleground has not disappeared; it has simply become less visible.

Average net promoter score improved from 8.2 in 2023 to 11.0 in 2024, then softened to 10.1 in 2025. This could indicate rising member expectations as the superannuation industry evolves. It is not a dramatic collapse, but it underlines a critical point: trust and satisfaction do not automatically convert into advocacy. Members may believe their fund is reliable, legitimate and broadly good value without becoming active promoters of it.

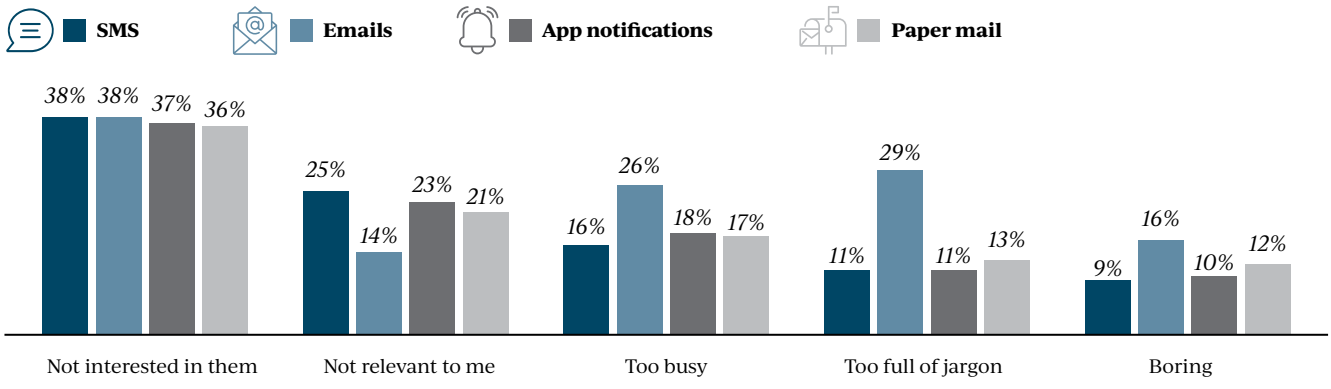
Trust tells a fund it has cleared the credibility hurdle. Advocacy suggests it has gone further – that it has created enough value and clarity for a member to recommend it to others. If advocacy is lagging while trust rises, the likely explanation is that funds are meeting baseline expectations without yet becoming meaningfully useful in members' lives.

REACH IS NO ENGAGEMENT

If there is one area where the sector looks outwardly strong, it is communications reach. Email remains the dominant

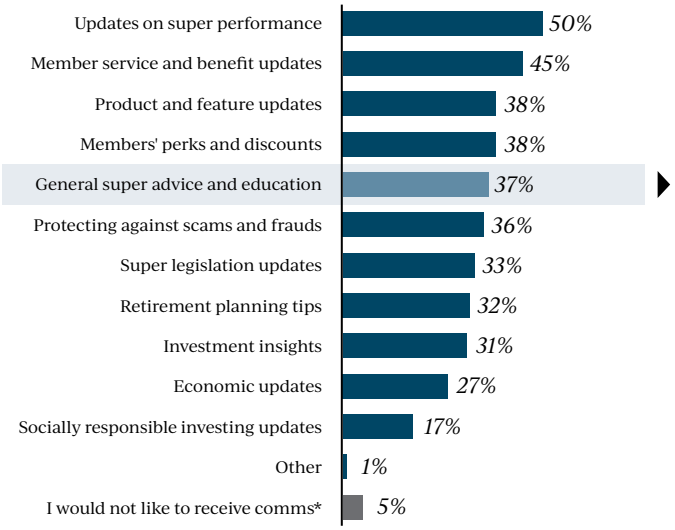
Reasons for not reading communications by channel

(Among those who have **not** read communications from main fund)



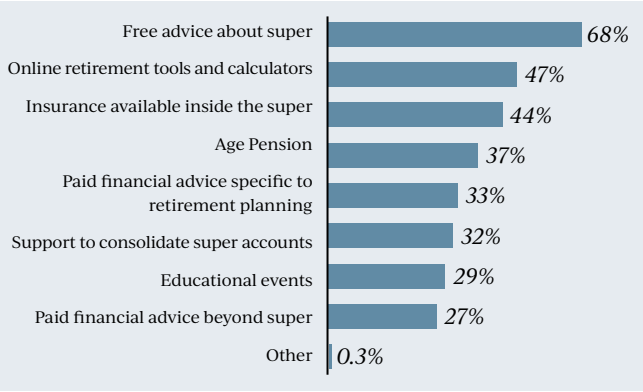
Preferred communication topics from main fund

(Among those who have read communications)



Preferred advice and education in communication

(Among those who want to receive communications about general super advice and education)



channel by a wide margin, with 82 per cent of members saying they read emails from their fund. Paper mail still has meaningful presence at 43 per cent, while app notifications are read by 42 per cent and SMS by 39 per cent. This is not a market struggling to get messages in front of people.

The trouble is that broad coverage can create a false sense of engagement. The same dataset shows that 31 per cent of members say they do not receive app notifications at all, and 33 per cent say they do not receive SMS communications. Even email, the strongest channel, has a minority (17 per cent) who either do not receive it or do not read it. That points to structural limits around contact details, permissions and opt-in settings – but also to a deeper issue: being able to send a message is not the same as being able to influence behaviour.

What is particularly telling is that satisfaction with communications is consistently high but largely flat. Among members who have read communications, satisfaction sits around 81 per cent for email, 79 per cent for app notifications and SMS and 79 per cent for paper mail. Members are broadly content yet not especially moved. Funds appear to be meeting expectations rather than shaping stronger engagement.

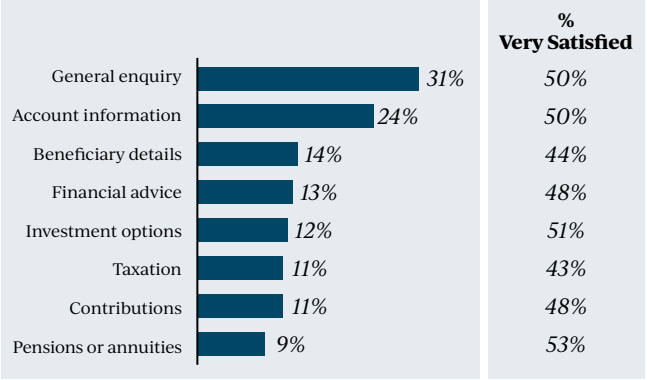
The reasons members give for not reading communications sharpen that point. Across channels, the leading explanations include "not interested in them", "not relevant to me", "too busy" and "too full of jargon". Email performs especially poorly on jargon, with 29 per cent of non-readers citing this as a reason, along with busyness at 26 per cent. Members are tuning out when the message feels generic, overly complex or not worth the effort required to process it.

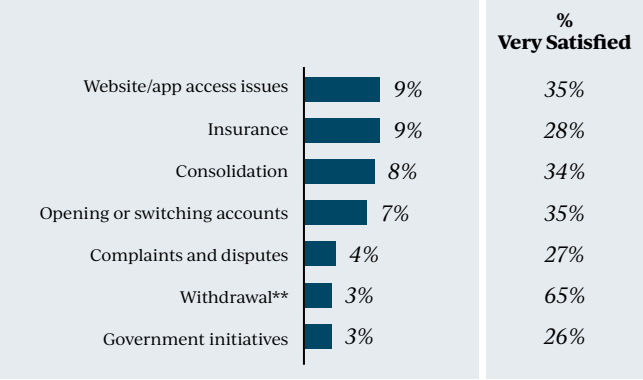
Digital matters, but not as an end in itself. 73 per cent of members who use any digital service find their fund's communications effective, compared with 52 per cent of non-digital-service users. Similarly, 81 per cent of digital users are satisfied with their fund, versus 61 per cent of non-digital channel users. Digital capability works when it reduces friction, improves clarity and helps members act.

The content preferences are revealing. Among members interested in general super advice and education, 68 per cent say they want free advice about super, well ahead of online retirement tools and calculators at 47 per cent, insurance information at 44 per cent, Age Pension content at 37 per cent and paid retirement-planning advice at 32 per cent.

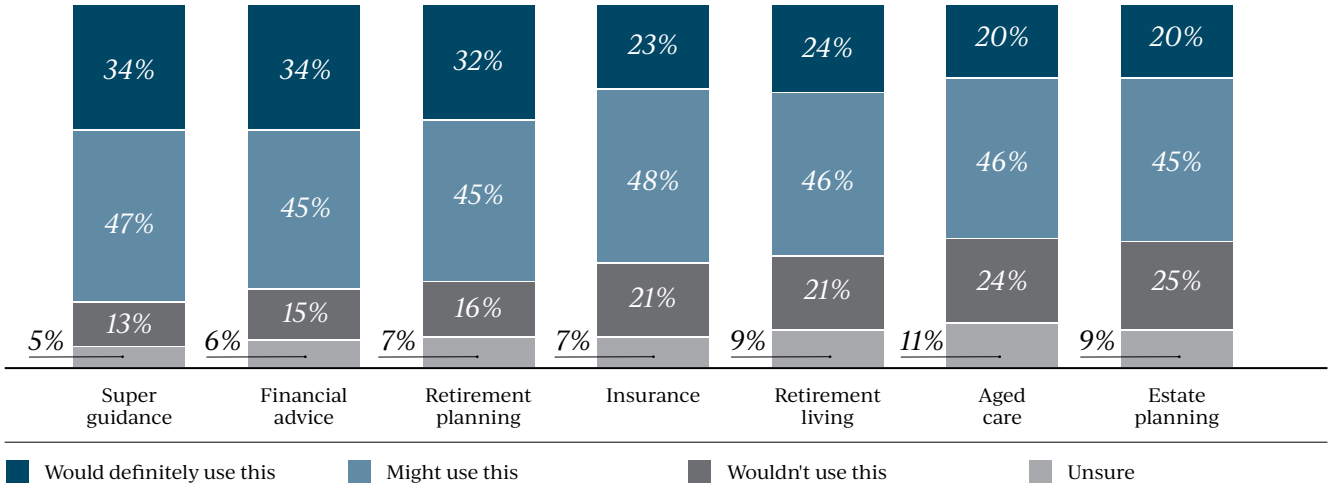
Reason for contact and satisfaction with service received

(Among those who have contacted their main fund in the last 2 years)





Interest in super fund services



When asked about preferred communication topics more broadly, the top responses are updates on super performance at 50 per cent, member service and benefit updates at 45 per cent, product and feature updates at 38 per cent and general super advice and education at 37 per cent.

The signal is clear: members do not want more output; they want more help. They want simpler explanations of what is happening to their money, guidance that reduces complexity, and help that feels accessible and easy to use. Funds that continue to treat communications as a broadcast task may preserve reach, but they will miss the deeper opportunity to build confidence.

SERVICE MOMENTS STILL MAKE OR BREAK TRUST

Service interactions remain one of the few moments where funds can materially strengthen or erode member trust. The research suggests contact is relatively common and often recent, with most members who have interacted with their fund doing so within the past six months. Members generally report feeling treated with respect and care – a meaningful strength in an industry where many interactions are triggered by uncertainty, stress or administrative complexity.

Most service demand is still routine. The highest-volume contact reasons are general enquiries at 31 per cent and account information at 24 per cent, followed by beneficiary details at 14 per cent, financial advice at 13 per cent and investment options at 12 per cent.

The more revealing story lies in the lower-volume, higher-stakes service journeys. Website or app access issues account for 9 per cent of contact, insurance queries 9 per cent, consolidation 8 per cent and account opening or switching 7 per cent. These are the interactions where satisfaction falls away most noticeably. Insurance stands out with only 28 per cent of members saying they were very satisfied. Complaints and disputes are similar at 27 per cent, while digital access problems produce only around 35 per cent who are very satisfied.

In financial services, complaints are often intensified not simply by the original issue, but by the feeling of being bounced around, left waiting or inadequately informed. Super is no different. Members may tolerate administrative friction in routine matters, but they are far less likely to overlook a poor experience during an insurance claim, a dispute, a consolidation issue or a failed login. These are the moments when vulnerability is highest, and when trust is either reinforced or seriously undermined.

For funds, the implication is clear. Good service is no longer just about tone; it is about ownership and resolution. Reducing hand-offs, improving follow-up communication, proactively updating members and shortening resolution times are all likely to have greater reputational value than courteous interactions alone.

THE NEXT COMPETITIVE EDGE IS CONFIDENCE

Taken together, the findings point to a sector at a crossroads. Australians are broadly satisfied with their fund, but the old foundations of engagement – acceptable service, decent returns, regular communications – no longer guarantee member loyalty. Members increasingly want relevance, control and confidence, particularly at transition points where their arrangements are more likely to be reassessed.

There is also a larger strategic opportunity in the type of role members want funds to play. The appetite for practical help spans retirement planning, aged care, estate planning, insurance and general financial guidance. Around one third of members say they would definitely use services in these areas, and almost half say they might. That is a broad activation pool, and it suggests the next phase of the superannuation industry may be defined less by who can communicate most often and more by who can become most useful when complexity rises.

That is the real lesson in the latest member engagement research. The industry has mastered reach, but it has not yet mastered reassurance. The next era of engagement will not be won on performance alone, and it will not be won by adding more communications to an already crowded environment. It will be won by funds that understand when confidence is fragile, simplify the decisions in front of members and provide guidance that feels timely, human and practical.

For funds, the priority is clear: identify the moments where member confidence is most fragile – transitions, claims, consolidation, retirement planning – and invest in making those moments simpler, faster and better supported. That is where loyalty is genuinely won. In a space where choices are infrequent but consequential, that may be the difference between a member who passively stays and one who actively trusts their fund to guide them. RM