

Digital Universality and the tyranny of Geography: A Comprehensive User Research Report on Member Engagement within Internet Lodge No. 9659

Executive Summary

The emergence of Internet Lodge No. 9659 under the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) represented a paradigmatic shift in the conception of Masonic interaction. Founded to bridge the gap between ancient tradition and the burgeoning digital age, the Lodge was designed to facilitate "Universal Masonry" through electronic means.¹ The vision was one of a global brotherhood unbound by geography, utilizing technology to foster education, research, and fellowship. However, the 2026 Member Engagement Survey³, when analyzed in conjunction with broader Masonic retention data and digital community benchmarks, reveals a critical divergence between this foundational vision and the current operational reality.

This report serves as a deep-dive analysis into the user experience (UX) of the Lodge's membership. It synthesizes quantitative data from the survey with qualitative sentiment analysis, contextualized against the backdrop of UGLE constitutional requirements, global retention trends (The Keystone Initiative), and best practices in digital community management.

The central finding of this research is that Internet Lodge No. 9659 is currently functioning as two distinct entities within a single warrant:

1. **The Core Constituency:** A predominantly European-based membership that enjoys high satisfaction (+66.6 NPS), accessible meeting times, and a sense of cultural and administrative continuity with UGLE norms.
2. **The Periphery:** A significant international cohort, particularly in the Americas, that experiences the Lodge as a source of friction. This group is characterized by a disastrous Net Promoter Score (-66.7), severe temporal exclusion due to rigid scheduling, and a feeling of cultural and linguistic alienation.³

While the Lodge successfully serves as a "Masonic Lifeboat" for retention—keeping unattached Brethren within the fold of regularity—it fails to convert these "holding" members

into active participants. The friction points are not merely inconveniences; they are structural barriers rooted in the adherence to a synchronous, UK-centric operating rhythm that ignores the realities of a global user base.

To transition from a "UK Lodge with a website" to a truly "Global Digital Lodge," the organization must undertake a radical restructuring of its digital engagement model. This involves decoupling value delivery from synchronous attendance, implementing AI-driven linguistic accessibility, and decentralizing the "British Core" to empower regional micro-communities.

Section 1: The Operational Context and User Personas

1.1 The Hybrid Paradox of the Digital Warrant

Internet Lodge No. 9659 occupies a unique and somewhat paradoxical position within the Masonic ecosystem. It is a "Regular" lodge, fully subject to the *Book of Constitutions* of the United Grand Lodge of England.⁴ This regularity provides its greatest strength—legitimacy and recognition—but also imposes its most significant constraints. Unlike "Virtual Lodges" in other jurisdictions that may meet and conduct business entirely online⁵, Internet Lodge is constitutionally tethered to the physical realm.

The Lodge meets physically three times a year in England/Wales for formal business, installations, and ceremonial work, with a fourth optional overseas visit.¹ Consequently, for the 600+ members scattered across 100 constitutions⁶, the "Lodge" is an abstraction for 360 days of the year. It exists as a digital construct: an email list, a website, and a Zoom screen. The user experience, therefore, is entirely dependent on the efficacy of these digital interfaces.

The survey data³ indicates that when these interfaces fail—whether through "spam-like" email threads, inaccessible Zoom times, or lack of translation—the institution effectively ceases to exist for the remote user. The hybrid model creates a hierarchy of experience: "First Class" members who can attend physically and align with the time zone, and "Second Class" members who are relegated to the role of passive observers of a dinner they cannot eat and a ritual they cannot witness.

1.2 User Personas and Demographic Segmentation

Analysis of the survey demographics and qualitative feedback allows for the construction of detailed user personas. Understanding these profiles is essential for interpreting satisfaction data.

Persona A: The "Digital Scholar" (Global, High Tenure)

- **Profile:** A Mason of 10+ years, often a Past Master or holder of Grand Rank.
- **Motivation:** Seeks deep esoteric knowledge, historical context, and "Universal Masonry".² They are less interested in the administrative mechanics of the Lodge and more focused on "Esoteric path deliberations".³
- **Friction:** Frustrated by the "dumbing down" of content or the focus on administrative minutiae. They value high-level debate and research.
- **Quote:** *"I like the fact that we have brothers who post very interesting and useful esoteric articles & links... I dislike the repetition of information."*³

Persona B: The "Masonic Refugee" (International, Mixed Tenure)

- **Profile:** A member who has left their mother lodge due to cost, politics, or relocation, or who lives in a jurisdiction with "infighting" (e.g., Spain, Switzerland).³
- **Motivation:** "Insurance." They use Internet Lodge to maintain their standing as a regular Mason under UGLE without the high costs or local politics of their home jurisdiction.
- **Behavior:** Passive. They pay dues to "retain access to Freemasonry" but rarely participate. They are the "holding lodge" demographic.
- **Quote:** *"My membership is primarily a way to retain access to Freemasonry... It functions partly as a 'holding lodge'."*³

Persona C: The "Disconnected Seeker" (Newer, <3 Years)

- **Profile:** Often younger (Under 30 to 45), joined post-pandemic expecting a vibrant, modern digital community.
- **Motivation:** Connection, mentorship, and active participation.
- **Friction:** Overwhelmed by archaic communication (email lists), intimidated by the "British Core," and confused by the lack of clear onboarding.
- **Quote:** *"I really do not know e.g how to send an email to our mailing list... I find that there is a strong core group formed by British brethren."*³

Section 2: Quantitative Analysis of Engagement and Sentiment

2.1 The Net Promoter Score (NPS) Crisis

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a standard metric for gauging loyalty, calculated by subtracting the percentage of Detractors (0-6) from Promoters (9-10).⁷ For non-profit membership organizations in 2025, a "Good" score is +32, and "Exceptional" is +50.⁷

A cross-tabulation of the survey data by region³ reveals a catastrophic divergence in member sentiment.

Table 1: Regional NPS Analysis

Region	Promoters (9-10)	Passives (7-8)	Detractors (0-6)	NPS Score	Benchmark Context
Europe	73.3%	20%	6.7%	+66.6	World Class. Comparable to top-tier brands like Apple or Costco. Indicates high loyalty and value alignment.
Americas	0%	33.3%	66.7%	-66.7	Crisis Level. Comparable to failing industries. Indicates active dissatisfaction and high churn risk.

Implications:

The European NPS of +66.6 confirms that the Lodge's operating model is highly effective for those in its primary time zone and cultural sphere. These members are "Very Satisfied," participate in physical and online events, and act as evangelists.

Conversely, the Americas NPS of -66.7 is a "red alert" indicator. It suggests that the value proposition for American members has collapsed. They are paying the same dues (£120 + UGLE fees) ⁸ but receiving a fundamentally broken product. The feedback explicitly links this dissatisfaction to "Time zone differences" and "Lack of connection".³ Without immediate intervention, this cohort is likely to attrition en masse, damaging the Lodge's claim to

"International" status.

2.2 Tenure vs. Satisfaction Lifecycle

Analyzing satisfaction through the lens of tenure ³ reveals a distinct lifecycle of engagement and disillusionment.

- **The "Honeymoon" Phase (<1 Year):** New members show mixed satisfaction. While some are "Very Satisfied," a worrying 22% are already "Neutral" or "Dissatisfied." Their primary complaints are structural: "Connection issues," "Language," and confusion about how to participate. This indicates a failure in the onboarding process—new users are not being adequately "tech-checked" or integrated before they hit barriers.
- **The "Valley of Death" (1–3 Years):** This cohort is the most critical for retention. The novelty has worn off, and the reality of 3:00 AM meetings has set in. Barriers shift from "Unaware of events" to "Topics don't match interests" and "Don't feel connected." This is where the "Spectator Problem" manifests; members feel like outsiders looking in.
- **The "Survivor" Phase (>10 Years):** Veterans report high satisfaction (67% Very Satisfied). However, their barriers are personal ("Health," "Age") rather than structural. This reflects "Survivor Bias"—those who couldn't handle the time zones or culture have already left. The Lodge cannot rely on this cohort for future growth, as they are aging out of active participation.

Section 3: The Tyranny of Greenwich Mean Time

3.1 The Temporal Disconnect

The most pervasive theme in the dataset is the exclusionary impact of the Lodge's schedule. Despite the "Internet" moniker implying 24/7 accessibility, the Lodge operates strictly on UK time.

- **Survey Evidence:** *"Time of online meeting because of 6 hour difference. Couple of hours later on Sunday preferred"* (Americas, 75+). *"I cannot attend online meetings during weekend, as I need to give priority to my family."* (Europe, 30-44).³

Analysis:

The current scheduling strategy (predominantly weekends or UK evenings) creates a systemic exclusion of the Americas (where UK evenings are mid-afternoon work hours) and Asia/Pacific (where UK evenings are the middle of the night).

- **The "Working Age" Conflict:** Younger members (30-44) across *all* regions indicate a conflict with family time on weekends. The "Keystone Initiative" retention studies ⁹ highlight that modern Masons prioritize family balance. Forcing a choice between Lodge and Family on a Sunday morning is a retention killer.
- **The "Retiree" Preference:** Older members often prefer weekday mornings or

afternoons, creating a direct conflict with the working-age demographic.

Strategic Insight:

The Lodge is attempting to serve a global audience with a "local" schedule. Best practices for managing global remote teams 10 emphasize "Rotating the Pain." No single time zone should bear the permanent burden of unsocial hours. By fixing meetings to UK convenience, the Lodge signals that international members are peripheral to the core operation.

3.2 Solutions for Temporal Friction

To align with global remote work standards, the Lodge must adopt a "Follow the Sun" or rotational model.¹²

Table 2: Proposed Rotational Schedule Model

Rotation Slot	Timing (UTC)	Target Region (Primary)	Target Region (Secondary)	Rationale
Slot A	Saturday 09:00	Europe / Africa	Asia / Pacific	Captures Europe morning and Asia evening.
Slot B	Wednesday 19:00	Europe / Africa	Americas (East Coast)	Captures Europe evening and Americas afternoon.
Slot C	Sunday 20:00	Americas	Europe (Night Owls)	Crucial: Dedicated Americas prime-time slot.

Note: Rotating through these slots quarterly ensures that the inconvenience is shared equitably among the brotherhood, fostering a sense of fairness and shared sacrifice.

Section 4: The Linguistic and Cultural Glass Ceiling

4.1 The "No Hablo Ingles" Barrier

"Universal Masonry" implies a diversity of tongues, yet the survey reveals a strict Anglophone hegemony that alienates non-native speakers.

- **Survey Evidence:** *"No hablo ingles... Estoy buscando métodos de traducción en tiempo real" (Europe, 45-59). "Is it possible to activate simultaneous translation in Zoom meetings?"*.³

Analysis:

The language barrier is twofold:

1. **Ritualistic Complexity:** Masonic English is archaic, filled with terms like "hele," "cowan," and "allude".¹³ For a second-language speaker, translating 18th-century English in real-time is cognitively exhausting.
2. **Social Velocity:** The "Informal social chats" ³ rely on rapid-fire banter, cultural references, and humor. Non-native speakers often withdraw from these interactions to avoid embarrassment, leading to the formation of national silos (e.g., the Spanish brethren staying on WhatsApp and ignoring the Lodge Zoom).

4.2 The "British Core" and Cultural Exclusion

Several respondents noted a feeling of exclusion by a "core group formed by British brethren".³ This is a common phenomenon in online communities known as "Core-Periphery Structure." The "Core" (Founders/UK locals) possess high social capital, shared history, and inside jokes. The "Periphery" (International/New members) feel like spectators.

- **Masonic Protocol:** UGLE protocol is distinct. American members accustomed to "business meetings" being separate from ritual (or open to different degrees) may feel corrected or "told off" when they inadvertently breach UGLE etiquette regarding titles or dress.¹⁴
- **Dining Culture:** The "Festive Board" is central to English Masonry.¹⁶ Replicating this online often results in a "Zoom Drinking Session" which may be culturally inappropriate for members from jurisdictions with different alcohol norms or for those seeking solemnity.

4.3 Technological Interventions for Inclusivity

The Lodge has failed to leverage available technology to bridge these gaps.

- **AI Translation:** Zoom and platforms like Wordly or Boostlingo offer real-time AI-translated captions.¹⁷ Implementing this is an immediate, low-cost accessibility win. It signals to non-English speakers that their presence is valued.

- **Visual Ritual:** Utilizing screen sharing for visual aids (tracing boards, diagrams) can help bridge the language gap, as symbols are universal even when words are not.¹⁹
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Section 5: Content Strategy – The Hunger for Light

5.1 The Desire for "Esoteric Path Deliberations"

The survey data shows a strong preference for "Esoteric path deliberations" and "Historical presentations" over social chats or business meetings.³

- **The Psychological Driver:** Members joining an *Internet* Lodge often do so because their local lodge fails to provide intellectual stimulation. They are seeking the "Hidden Mysteries of Nature and Science".²⁰ They want to understand the Qabala, the origins of the ritual, and comparative symbolism.²¹
- **The Delivery Gap:** The Lodge often defaults to administrative proceduralism or "safe" lectures. The data suggests a demand for *deep work*—structured, academic, and esoteric content that justifies the time investment.

5.2 The "Oriental Chair" and Leadership Burden

The survey touches on the burden of leadership, with members noting "Approaching the Oriental Chair" as a barrier to participation.³ The role of Worshipful Master in a digital lodge is uniquely demanding.

- **The "Digital Master":** Unlike a physical Master who manages a meeting once a month, the Internet Lodge Master manages a 24/7 digital community. They must be part CEO, part Moderator, and part IT Support.²²
- **Succession Planning:** The survey indicates a reluctance among newer members to volunteer due to "Lack of time." To ensure leadership continuity, the Lodge must simplify the administrative burden of the Chair, perhaps by delegating the "Digital Community Manager" role to a dedicated officer separate from the Master.

Section 6: Retention Strategy – The "Digital Lifeboat"

6.1 The "Holding Lodge" Function

A critical insight from the qualitative data is the unadvertised role of Internet Lodge as a retention vessel for UGLE.

- **The Scenario:** A Mason moves countries, becomes housebound, or falls out with his local lodge. Instead of resigning (demitting), he joins Internet Lodge to maintain his "Regularity".⁴
- **The Insight:** *"It allows many Brethren to remain connected to Freemasonry who might otherwise be forced to leave altogether... the lodge functions partly as a 'holding lodge'."*

Strategic Implication:

The Lodge should stop viewing these passive members as "failed attendees" and start viewing them as a successful retention cohort. They are effectively "Subscribing Patrons."

The strategy for this group should be low-friction maintenance:

- Provide high-quality *asynchronous* content (newsletters, recorded lectures) that validates their membership.
- Do not harass them for non-attendance at live meetings.
- Recognize their financial contribution to the Lodge's stability.

6.2 The "Keystone" Context

The "Keystone Initiative" ⁹ emphasizes that retention relies on "Deepening the Masonic Experience." For Internet Lodge, this means moving beyond the "Zoom Call" as the sole unit of value.

- **Asynchronous Education:** Create a "Lodge of Instruction" repository using the Solomon platform.²⁴ Allow members to complete modules on their own time and discuss them in forum threads. This accommodates the "Time Poor" and "Wrong Time Zone" personas.

Section 7: Technology and Governance

7.1 The "Email List" Legacy

The reliance on email lists is a major friction point for younger members (<3 years tenure).

- **User Voice:** *"Some of the email chains are essentially spam... I blanket delete the emails."* ³
- **The Problem:** Threaded email discussions are hard to follow, prone to "Reply All" disasters, and bury important information (Summons) under chatter.
- **Recommendation:** Transition to a tiered communication stack:
 1. **Official Business:** Email (One-way broadcasts via Mailchimp/Constant Contact).
 2. **Masonic Education:** Discourse/Forum (Threaded, searchable, categorized).
 3. **Social Chat:** WhatsApp/Signal (Instant, ephemeral, distinct from Lodge business).²⁵

7.2 Voting and Constitutional constraints

A significant dissatisfaction point is the opacity of decision-making. *"Significant decisions are not taken in open lodge"*.³

- **The Barrier:** UGLE rules traditionally require physical presence for binding votes. However, laws and HOA regulations in 2025/2026 are increasingly recognizing electronic

voting.²⁶

- **The Innovation:** The Lodge should lobby UGLE for a pilot program to allow *secure digital voting* for non-constitutional business (e.g., charitable donations, social event planning). This would enfranchise the international membership who currently feel like second-class citizens with taxation (dues) but no representation.

7.3 Social Media and "Digital Ambassadorship"

The Lodge has a duty to police its digital borders. UGLE's social media policy ²⁸ prohibits the discussion of "Signs, Tokens, or Words."

- **The Tension:** Members want to discuss ritual, but open platforms are unsafe.
- **The Solution:** A strictly "tyled" (password protected) member-only portal is essential. The current "Members Area" needs to be more than a document repository; it needs to be an interactive community hub that replaces the insecure email list for sensitive discussions.

Section 8: Recommendations and Roadmap

Based on the synthesis of data, the following roadmap is proposed to bridge the gap between the Lodge's potential and its current performance.

8.1 Immediate Tactical Interventions (Months 1-3)

1. **Implement AI Translation:** Immediately enable translated captions on all Zoom meetings. This addresses the "No hablo ingles" barrier and signals inclusivity.¹⁷
2. **The "Rotate the Pain" Schedule:** Publish a 12-month calendar that explicitly rotates meeting times between Slot A (Europe/Asia) and Slot B (Americas). Label them clearly so members know *why* the time is changing.¹⁰
3. **Communication Audit:** Segregate the email list. Create a strict "Official Business" channel and migrate social chatter to a dedicated platform (e.g., Discord or a private Forum) to stop the "spam" perception.

8.2 Strategic Structural Changes (Months 4-12)

1. **The "Digital Almoner" System:** Use login data to track "missing" brethren. If a member hasn't logged in for 3 months, trigger a pastoral care check-in. This moves from reactive to proactive retention.²⁹
2. **Decentralized Mentorship:** Abandon the UK-centric proposer model. Assign new members a "Digital Buddy" in their own time zone/region. Empower these regional buddies to hold local "Watch Parties" or social hours.³⁰
3. **Asynchronous Content Hub:** Invest in recording and editing lectures. Create a "Netflix for Masonry" library on the website where members can watch presentations they

missed due to time zones.

8.3 Long-Term Vision (Year 2+)

1. **The "Global Research Hub":** Position Internet Lodge not just as a lodge, but as UGLE's primary research unit for *Digital Freemasonry*. Publish papers on the sociology of online brotherhood, attracting the "Digital Scholar" persona.
2. **Constitutional Lobbying:** Use the data from this report to present a case to Grand Lodge for "Hybrid Voting Rights," arguing that true Universality requires the enfranchisement of remote brethren.

Conclusion

Internet Lodge No. 9659 is at a crossroads. The -66.7 NPS in the Americas is a harbinger of decline. If the Lodge continues to operate as a physical UK lodge broadcast over the internet, it will shrink into a regional entity with a passive international donor base.

However, the survey also reveals a deep hunger for connection. Members *want* to belong. They are asking for the tools—translation, scheduling, and community platforms—to participate. By embracing these recommendations, the Lodge can fulfill its original warrant: to be a true porchway to Universal Freemasonry, where the sun never sets, and the Lodge never truly closes.

Data Tables & Analysis

Table 3: Sentiment Analysis of Open-Ended Feedback Trends

Theme Cluster	Keywords Identified	Sentiment Score	Strategic Implication
Schedule/Time	"Time zone," "Weekend," "Work," "Sleep"	Very Negative	Primary churn driver. Requires structural change (Rotation).
Content/Value	"Esoteric," "History," "Lecture," "Ritual"	Positive	The core product is good; delivery mechanism is the bottleneck.

Community	"Brotherhood," "International," "Friendship"	Positive	Strong emotional bond exists; needs better channels to flourish.
Inclusion	"Language," "English," "British core," "Clique"	Negative	Urgent need for cultural competency and translation tools.
Technology	"Spam," "Email," "Zoom," "Connection"	Mixed	Tech is a barrier for new/old members; enabler for mid-tenure.

Source: Qualitative coding of open-ended responses in.³

Table 4: The "Lifeboat" Retention Metrics

Retention Category	Motivation	Risk Factor	Mitigation Strategy
Active Participant	Social/Educational value	Low (High Satisfaction)	Maintain quality content.
Passive "Lifeboat"	Maintaining Regularity/Status	Medium (Value perception)	Low-cost/high-value updates (Newsletters).
Frustrated Seeker	Seeking connection but failing	High (Churn Imminent)	Immediate Intervention: Onboarding buddy, Time zone fix.

Source: Derived from "Keystone Initiative" retention logic ⁹ applied to survey personas.

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