



KDG and ReachBright present:

THE SHORT GUIDE TO MAINTAINING ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

WHY IS ENGAGING ALUMNI IMPORTANT?

Maintaining a strong relationship with your alumni is perhaps the most important endeavour a college or university can embark upon. It's neither a simple nor quick undertaking; nevertheless, it's one that is vital to asserting your institution's place in the world of higher education.

Alumni are responsible for your institution's reputation. Their achievements in the real world reflect how well they did in your classrooms and lecture halls, your science labs and music rooms. It's their successes, more so than the names of your faculty members or the wins of your football team, that build, mold, and preserve the name your school makes for itself.

If alumni do well, your school will do well and a cycle commences. If alumni succeed, if they feel that their time at your school (and the money they paid) was worth it, they are more likely to make donations that keep alive the education your school offers. With more donations, your rankings in publications like the *U.S. News & World Report* and *Wall Street Journal* will increase, promoting your school to generations of future students who will carry on the legacy of the alumni before them. With so much at stake, it's critical that your relationship with alumni remains strong.

THIS GUIDE CAN HELP

At KDG, we've helped some of the most prestigious universities across the nation better engage their alumni and better maintain those very important relationships. Based on over 15 years of experience, we've put together this short guide that will help colleges and universities improve their alumni relations.

With tips for better communications, pointers for more donations, and everything in between, we've managed to fit a lot of info into a rather short guide. We hope you'll find it useful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Don't Wait Until They're Alumni	4
Send Better Emails	5
Recognize Their Excellence	6
Stay Connected Online	7
How ReachBright and KDG Can Help	8



DON'T WAIT UNTIL THEY'RE ALUMNI

WHEN SHOULD SCHOOLS START ENGAGING ALUMNI?

Perhaps one of the biggest mistakes a school can make when it comes to building alumni relations is waiting until its students are alumni to do so. If a college or university waits until a student has already left campus to make an impact on his or her life, it's far too late for any meaningful and lasting relationship to develop.

It's never too early to engage alumni. In fact, it's best practice to begin when the admissions cycle starts, before those alumni are even students.¹ As admissions directors search through piles of applications and draft those acceptance letters, it's important that directors are choosing an applicant who displays a willingness to engage with and participate in the campus community. You don't just want a student to commit to your school for four years. You want them to commit for life.

FOCUS ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

If you focus on a better student experience, you'll have less work to do when it comes to engaging these students once they are alumni. Alumni who look back fondly at their time in college, who believe that the university played an active role in helping them get to where they are, won't have to be persuaded to donate by newsletter blasts or never ending phone calls. They'll want to be engaged.

It's also beneficial to get alumni involved in the student experience.¹ Invite alumni to orientation programs. Have alumni as guest speakers. Hold alumni networking events. Give your alumni opportunities to interact with current students and give your current students opportunities to interact with alumni. If students see frequent and energetic alumni participation on campus, an importance in alumni engagement will be instilled in them.

As mentioned previously, the alumni relationship is a cycle, one that will be hard to put a stop to if done correctly. So start early.

SEND BETTER EMAILS

DO ALUMNI EVEN WANT EMAILS FROM THEIR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY?

Yes. Even after they graduate and clear their inbox of all the emails from professors, clubs, and advisors, alumni still would like to see college emails in their inbox. Surprisingly, an estimated 73% of alumni would like more emails from their alma mater.² However, they want these emails to be deeper, more engaging, and more personal. It's the "depth" of these emails that is most important.³

HOW MARKETING SEGMENTATION CAN HELP

To achieve this depth, break down your contacts into smaller groups and target them based on their interests and unique needs. Known as marketing segmentation, this is not a new phenomenon. Businesses have been using it in their marketing campaigns for years because of its significantly lower risk and opportunity cost.⁴ Smaller businesses may have thousands of contacts. Colleges and universities, on the other hand: tens of thousands. Segmenting contacts divides them into more manageable, homogenous groups whose interests and needs can be more easily distinguished than they could have been otherwise. Break these groups down by age, by major, by location, etc.

Once your target groups are identified and communications are sent, you'll have a much easier time narrowing and defining what matters most to them. With such information, you can target your giving campaigns toward these causes. Are alumni most interested in the theatre arts? Hold a campaign to fundraise for your theatre's renovation. Are the science alumni the ones most actively opening, reading, and clicking on their communications? Hold a campaign to raise money for a new science building or new science equipment. With so much information at your fingertips, use it to your advantage. Make alumni feel as though you're listening to them. Make them want to give by giving them a stake in the process.



RECOGNIZE THEIR EXCELLENCE

ARE YOU ACKNOWLEDGING ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENTS?

Oftentimes in higher education, the school is trying to sell itself and highlight its own accomplishments so more students enroll, more faculty apply, and more alumni engage. But it's also important for schools to take a step back and recognize alumni excellence.⁵ Let alumni know that your school would not be nearly as successful without their hard work in the real world, hard work that has been a testament to the quality education your school can provide.

Alumni should be honored for their drive in the workplace and for their dedication to the community. From the sciences to the arts, applaud alumni from all professions.

ALUMNI "PAY IT BACK," EVEN IF THEY DON'T PAY

One of the biggest mistakes a college or university can make, one that may potentially turn alumni away from donating, is a "pay it back" attitude, or a belief that, if alumni are successful, they should show their gratitude to the school in the form of donations. But donations are not the only means by which alumni can and should be expected to give back. Alumni have "paid it back" by their ability to use the education they've acquired to make a difference in the world outside of the classroom.⁶

Once a school comes to recognize this and reward those alumni, alumni will be more likely to engage with a university that appreciates their hard work.

THREE EASY WAYS TO RECOGNIZE ALUMNI EXCELLENCE:

1. Hold annual alumni award ceremonies for those who have done good in the community and have done well in the workplace.
2. Has an alum done something amazing? Let the world know in the form of a press release, blog, social media post, or email. Don't forget about your snail mail publications, like your semi-annual alumni magazine or monthly circular.
3. Invite alumni back to campus for networking events, seminars, speeches, etc. This is the perfect opportunity for current students to see how important alumni are.

STAY CONNECTED ONLINE

ENGAGING YOUNGER ALUMNI

For many institutions, it is the younger alumni who are harder to engage. This is due to a variety of reasons, including a lack of financial stability and a movement away from more traditional means of communication like snail mail and phone calls. In fact, over 90% of millennials use social media as a major form of communication.⁷ This means that colleges and universities should go where these young alumni are.

Thanks to social media, it has never been easier to stay connected. Whether your alumni have moved across the country or across the ocean, the internet has made it possible to tear down borders, transcend international boundaries, and stay connected.

WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA SITES SHOULD SCHOOLS BE USING?

Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are among the most popular social media platforms colleges and universities are using to boost alumni engagement.

Twitter is the perfect place to start a conversation and share breaking news through short bursts of 140 characters or less. Tweet about big games, alumni events, and crowdfunding campaigns. Facebook, on the other hand, is the ultimate platform for photo sharing. Facebook posts with photos actually drive more engagement than other social sites.⁸ While tweets create excitement, photos create a sense of nostalgia.

For young alumni, many still in the job market, LinkedIn is also the perfect way to keep in touch. Make sure your college or university has an alumni group on the site.⁸ This will keep alumni connected and help your school's professional network grow.

KEEP POSTING

One thing to keep in mind with social media? News changes fast and nowhere is that truer than on the internet. One tweet a month or one shared photo every other week isn't going to help your alumni stay connected. Social media requires a commitment to rapid posting, frequent sharing, and real-time news. There's a lot to keep up with. It's no wonder many colleges and universities are employing entire social media departments!

HOW REACHBRIGHT AND KDG CAN HELP

“They [KDG] were right there with us providing advice and perspective every step of the way.”

-MUHLENBERG COLLEGE

[ReachBright](#) is the first and only tool that combines both marketing data with operational data to facilitate greater engagement for prospective students, current students, and alumni. By combining data from campus visits, donations, email engagement, event attendance, and social media interactivity, ReachBright helps leading institutions market more effectively and drive better engagement through the use of big data. Whether you want your institution to increase its enrollment efforts, engage more of its current students, or develop stronger alumni relations, ReachBright has the tools you will need.

REACHBRIGHT CAN:

- **Track** users' interests based on web-browsing and engagement activity and automatically market to them based on those interests.
- **Identify** key areas of your website that foster greater engagement for prospective students and alumni alike.
- **Record** donor history and always know who your most generous alums are.
- **Assign** tags to get a better idea of prospects' interests.
- **Create** customized reports on engagement, email activity, and web activity.

To see the power of ReachBright for yourself, we invite you to take a [self-guided demo](#) of the application.

Developed by KDG, a company that has over 15 years of experience helping higher educational institutions improve their engagement through innovative web development and design, ReachBright is the only marketing tool of its kind. Learn more at: <http://kyledavidgroup.com/> 

RESOURCES:

1. Andrews, Margaret. "How Do You Develop a Wildly Successful Alumni Relations Effort?" Inside Higher Ed, 1 Aug. 2012, <<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/strategy/how-do-you-develop-wildly-successful-alumni-relations-effort>>
2. House, Patricia B. "Q&A: How to Engage Younger Alumni." American Council on Education, 15 June 2015, <www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/QA-How-to-Engage-Younger-Alumni.aspx>
3. Shaindlin, Andy. "Three Trends in Global Community Engagement." Alumni Futures, 3 Dec. 2016, <www.alumnifutures.com/2016/12/three-trends.html>
4. Gemma, Will. "6 Benefits of Market Segmentation: Less Risk, More Profit." Udemy Blog, 26 March 2014, <<https://blog.udemy.com/benefits-of-market-segmentation/>>
5. "The Importance of Alumni Relations." Supporting Education, 20 Jan. 2013, <<http://www.supportingeducation.org/2013/01/10/importance-alumni-relations/>>
6. Hart, Ann Weaver. "Rethinking Effective Alumni Engagement." The University of Arizona, 3 Nov. 2015, <<http://president.arizona.edu/communications/blog/rethinking-effective-alumni-engagement>>
7. "Social Networking Use." Pew Research, 1 July 2015, <www.pewresearch.org/data-trend/media-and-technology/social-networking-use/>
8. Frank, Tema. "Reaching out to University Alumni through Social Media." University Affairs, 13 Mar. 2013, <www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/reaching-out-to-university-alumni-through-social-media/>

