



Alumni Engagement on Your Website

First, a word about the language of alumni.

Alumna – singular, female

Alumnus – singular, male or gender neutral

Alumnae – plural, female

Alumni – plural, male or gender neutral

Your website is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It is the front door to your school, available to anyone who seeks it out or stumbles across it. In these days of increased concern about enrollment, we have become very sensitive to the marketing aspects of our sites: what information prospective parents need on your site.

In many schools, though, we are just beginning the conversation about what alumni need on your site. Case in point: the number of schools who have an alumni page—whereon the alumnus finds only a form that they can send in order to stay in touch with the school. Imagine how it feels to visit a site that is full of information about your alma mater and then the nod that you receive as part of the history of the school. You know that that nod is basically a request for information so that you can be solicited.

Let's give them more. Let's give them recognition that we value the history of the school and that we honor the experience that alumni of the forties, the fifties, etc. had in our school. What follows is not a comprehensive list but some ideas to get you started thinking of ways that you can reach alumni through your website.

History page. We hope that you have documents somewhere in your community about the origins of your institution. Check the parish office where these references are more likely to have been stored. Perhaps someone put together books for anniversaries; if you find these, be sure that they are carefully stored, that they are valued, and that they become part of the institutional memory of your school. Mine the information in them to develop a good history page on your site; scan the photos and documents in these books and post them on your site. (And use them on Facebook to tease people to visit the site.) If you do not find anything, contact the Archives Office of the Archdiocese. You must make an appointment to visit them and they do not allow you to take anything home with you but they are a tremendous reference.

Alumni news. This can be a project to get going but once it is going it is as easy as connecting it to an alumni Facebook page. (Which you should have.) Start by talking to people in your community who are alumni. Ask them if they will take on this small project: finding out who is doing what. This is different from getting addresses, which is an important, but really, less fun project. This task involves knowing which alumni parent, which senior citizen, knows everything that is going on with everyone. Make it easy for them to report to you and when they do, post their news immediately.

Alumni photos. Find those class pictures, scan them and post them. Ask for other pictures and post them, too. The Christmas pageant from 1943, the crossing guards from 1962, etc. Use them in e-newsletters, or on Facebook and ask for help identifying the people, or the event, or the year.

Alumni in the classroom. Invite alumni back to talk to your students about anything. Really. Studying Vatican II? Ask an alumna from the fifties to talk about the Latin Mass and learning all those prayers to be an altar server. Studying Vietnam? Someone from the classes of the late fifties or early sixties served and could talk about it. There are unlimited opportunities. Name these opportunities on a page on your website to get people thinking. Then launch the program with specific invitations, take photos and post them. (This is also a fantastic way to help current students value the history of your school and understand that they, too, will one day be alumni who will be invited home to share their stories.)

Special opportunities. Children's Book Week (May). Invite alumni (personally) to come as guest readers during Book Week. Set it up with teachers so that each grade gets a reader during the week. Take pictures, post them on your site. April is National Poetry Month. Invite alumni to read or write poetry with the children. (*Chase's Book of Annual Events* is one source of hundreds of reasons to celebrate.)

Alumni profiles. If you have a program that awards alumni in some way this is where you want the online story. If you don't have such a program, have a page online that just features alumni. (Go back to the alumni news section and start with those same ideas.)

Alumni memories. You'll find that many alumni love to write little essays about their experience at your school. Encourage this by posting what you get. Think about people sending you things, or commenting on Facebook, or even sending a gift, as them raising their hands and saying "notice me, notice me." Notice them! Interview the alumni who came from large families; videotape their stories (even their goofiness) and post these on the site. Do your fifth graders learn to write letters? Ask their teachers if you can supply them with alumni addresses. Have the boys and girls write to the boys and girls who graduated fifty years before them. Post some of the responses online.

Reunion guidelines. You want them to "reune" and you want them to do it on your campus.* Make it easy for them. Make a list of the guidelines that will work in your community and include the list of things that you will do to simplify the reunion process. For instance, you will mail the invitations for them, get the liquor license, arrange to have the room set-up before the event and cleaned afterward. You will take pictures that will appear on the website. Post this list of guidelines on the website with photos of past reunions. We are all about customer service. **Do not ever, ever, ever charge alumni for having a class reunion on your campus. Never.**

Links. Provide a link to the website of the religious order that served your school. Build a relationship with their development officer so that you can keep your alumni informed of where the sisters are and what they are doing. If other schools in your area have alumni pages on their sites (check them out first) link to those pages *from your alumni page*. (Not from your front page; you don't want to undermine your own marketing efforts.)

*I don't think that you can decide that the Class of '87 is having a reunion on October 4; some schools do this or they arrange reunions annually for the classes in increments of five years, having a reunion weekend. Do what you think will work in your community.

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