

## How HR can use alumni networks online to recruit best talent

By Karen Cariss, CEO of PageUp People

An alumni is a popular term used by schools and universities for students who have completed their degrees, moved on but still want to feel like they have a connection with the institution where they built friendships and memories. The meaning today is applied in the workplace where organisations use this network to nurture relationships with past employees. The reason to create an alumni varies depending on the employer's motivation and objective, yet whether it is to recruit, retain or just foster goodwill and build long term positive brand equity, alumni programs are an important component in building a fully cohesive talent management strategy.

Unfortunately today only a handful of companies are taking advantage of the concept. Some have been thinking about it but have pushed it down the priority list of things to do while others are considering incorporating it. Those companies that have already incorporated an alumni networking program are receiving outstanding feedback from past employees, with some having already attracted returning staff while others have influenced ex-employees' new employers to become customers. Rather than wait, build your own alumni network and program and test its success. The results will excite you.

So what are the steps?

**Set an objective.** Why would your company benefit from an alumni program? Is it purely to recruit or is it to ensure past employees talk about your brand in a positive way with friends and family in the hope that their discussions could generate business referrals. It is important that you are clear about why you want to create a network and what you want to achieve from it.

**Create the criteria for entry.** People want to feel like they belong to an exclusive club, yet at the same time you want to be able to obtain relevant data to use in the future. Some companies may just choose

to invite any ex-employee to a social gathering just to strengthen relationships generally without any real end goal in mind. However, designing a selection standard upfront will help you gather, analyse and measure your achievement over the longer term. It also helps you better formulate communication strategies that will ensure a more effective engagement with your audience. For example, if your objective is to ultimately recruit sales or customer relations roles ensure that the ex-employee invited to the alumni was in a sales or related role. You may also want to record the nature of their departure and their tenure of employment. These factors can also influence whether you want to continue to put energy in building a relationship with the individual and how you may want to segment your groups.

**Understand your audience.** Think like a marketer. Like any marketing strategy it is important you know exactly what interests your target market to engage them effectively. For example, there is no point organising a golf day for a group of people who are not interested in the sport.

**Devise a communication strategy and plan.** Once you have identified your audience's interests, identify which information activities and medians you want to use, classify what content is relevant, and how frequently you want to communicate. Decide whether you want an online or offline strategy or both. These days online is the simplest and more effective way to reach and engage. It is also easier to reach a broader audience and integrate your activities into your existing digital marketing plan. At PageUp People we release regular podcasts to keep our customers up to date with the latest industry news [www.pageuppeople.com/resource\\_download.htm](http://www.pageuppeople.com/resource_download.htm). It is important when creating your plan that you think of new types of communication that attracts your audiences whilst creating an emotional tie. For example, send the latest job offers via SMS alerts or deliver a short-

ened version of the CEOs end of financial year address to staff via an MMS vodcast or set up a social interaction forum where alumnis can reconnect with each other like on Facebook. HR managers and marketers should remember that what the HR team creates in terms of attracting alumnis also helps other areas of marketing in building the overall brand image. In fact, if marketing and HR professionals were to work together they could devise a holistic and integrated marketing and talent management plan that would achieve a positive result for the entire company.

**Allocate a dedicated alumni network manager.** It takes a committed resource to make an alumni network successful. To achieve this someone needs to be dedicated to the job either full-time or part-time, depending on the extensiveness of the communication program. The alumni manager would be responsible for adding new members, inviting new ones, answering questions, writing content and executing and managing the communication program. It is important to keep the network alive. Content needs to be strong. Consider incentive programs; they can be influential in encouraging staff recommendations or to create new business referrals. How and what you communicate are the keys to building a successful alumni network. Alumni management is an integral part of your talent management strategy. Any alumni activity supports all areas of your talent strategy. It not only drives people to your company, it builds brand image and confirms to the people already working for you that you support a culture of open communication which in effect strengthens your retention strategy. Never forget your alumnis are a walking talking advertisement for your company and you can never underestimate the positive value that they can bring long after they have gone.

For more information about PageUp People, or their online alumni networking module, please visit [www.pageuppeople.co.uk](http://www.pageuppeople.co.uk)