



It's a Two Way Street: Alumni Programs and the Value Proposition

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Legal Employer Alumni Programs

- What's in it for us
 - Brand ambassadors
 - Thought leadership
 - Business development
 - Talent referrals
 - Job openings
- What's in it for them
 - Networking
 - Mentoring
 - Continuing Legal Education
 - Thought leadership

Table Topics Idea Exchange

- Collaborating with other departments
- Alumni events
- Internal and external communications
- Challenge exchange

Collaborating with Other Departments

- Professional Development
- Business Development, Marketing & Communications
- Recruiting
- Human Resources/Associate Development
- Diversity & Inclusion

Alumni Events

- Continuing Legal Education (CLE)
- Cocktail receptions
- Cultural/sporting events
- Iconic events unique to your market
- Targeted dinners
- Alumni speaker series
- Panel presentations
- Roundtables

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Alumni Communications

- Internal
 - Alumni news and moves
 - Events
 - New initiatives
- External
 - Website
 - Newsletter
 - Events
 - Firm and alumni news
 - Social media

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Challenge Exchange

- What keeps you up at night?
- What are your biggest challenges?
 - Firm culture, program buy-in, etc.
 - Technology (SelectMinds)
 - Budget
 - Alumni participation

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Internal Communications and Buy-In: Critical Success Factors for Law Firm Alumni Programs

by Abby Raanan and Leo Strupczewski

Law firms across the country are devoting resources to developing and enhancing their own alumni programs for many reasons. These include improving a firm's brand reputation, retaining and acquiring new business, and recruiting the best people. Regardless of a law firm's size and experience with "alumni networks," effective internal communications and buy-in from the firm's current employee base are two critical factors in achieving a firm's goals. These best practices are designed to help you get there at your firm.

Educate Your Audience

Organizational buy-in is critical to the success of any alumni program. To gain or enhance organizational support for your firm's alumni program, you need to continuously educate your internal audience about the program and the benefits it provides to the firm and its people. If you expect your organization to stand behind the program and promote it to your alumni, you need to tell them exactly what it is and what's in it for them.

Create internal and external communication calendars to ensure consistent messaging, but be careful not to flood your audiences with irrelevant information. Too much communication can be annoying and will cause people to quickly unsubscribe from all future correspondence. Take the time to create unique messages for your internal audience. Tell the lawyers about new program initiatives and educate them on who and where your alumni are. Some may not know — or may need a

reminder about — how many of their former colleagues currently work in-house or hold influential positions in government, business, or academia.

If your firm has a dedicated alumni website, send periodic alumni newsletters with direct links to the latest alumni news, interviews, and upcoming event information. One of the key components of your internal communications should be continued explanations of the program's benefits. Specifics on website content updates are important, but also consider highlighting the number of alumni who recently updated their profiles and the number of colleagues who recently registered for the site. The "everyone else is doing it message" is a powerful one, and it works.

Staying in contact with your internal audience through email plays an important role in creating buzz and buy-in from the firm, but there is no substitute for getting in front of people and making sure they understand the alumni program and its value. Set up in-person meetings where possible or schedule conference calls with new lawyers as part of the "on-boarding" process. You don't want a new lawyer's first engagement with the alumni network to be a general newsletter. Making the individual connection should not take a lot of time or effort and is much more likely to be remembered favorably than an email communication sent to all lawyers. This step will also help increase the visibility of the alumni program as an important firm initiative and make it easy for lawyers to get engaged in the program early.

Share Responsibilities

One of the biggest challenges of any alumni program is confirming who your alumni are, where they are, and what they're doing. These are, of course, the most valuable parts of your program as well.

In your efforts to collect or confirm this information, be sure to reach out to current lawyers and staff for help. You will likely find that many of the firm's personnel stay in contact with their former colleagues and have more accurate information than may be available in old HR records or online.

One way to solicit help without too much burden is to hold an internal contest. Ask members of the firm to send you the contact information they have for alumni during a set time period and offer a prize for those providing the most contacts. Repeat this contest every so often to remind members of the firm that up-to-date contact information is a valuable resource.

Sharing alumni event invitations, lists, and responses with the firm's internal audience and asking them to review the lists also can help increase attendance at events and create more internal buzz about an event. If alumni event invitations are not reaching their intended recipients, members of the firm may be able to provide more accurate contact information. Additionally, if lawyers review an attendee list and see former colleagues are planning to attend, they may be more interested in attending themselves. If they notice an alumni friend has not responded, they can personally encourage their former colleague to attend. Alumni will appreciate the personal outreach, and little time or effort is required for this outreach. Providing a copy of the attendee list to your internal audience prior to an event will also inform them about who to look for at an event, whether for the purpose of reconnecting with old friends or establishing new relationships.

Offer Value

The viability and strength of an alumni program is often a direct reflection of the firm's culture. It is important to remember, and to remind your internal audience, that your alumni network is a community made up of both alumni and current members of the firm — all sharing a common bond. Alumni program events, websites, and related initiatives should be designed to serve both former and current colleagues. Both are valuable prospective alumni contacts, regardless of seniority, partnership potential, or performance. To capitalize on their value, law firms must create a culture of lasting friendship and ongoing professional connection between the organization and its people.

Developing strong internal relationships amongst lawyers while they are working at the firm will help reinforce the belief that when a lawyer departs, the relationship does not end. Instead, new opportunities for the relationship lie ahead. Creating an atmosphere where all lawyers are valued throughout their entire tenure at the firm, and even after they leave, will likely result in alumni continuing to speak highly of the firm and in new opportunities for them to incorporate the firm into their future endeavors. All incoming lawyers are potential future alumni, and the value of the relationship between the firm and each lawyer begins with recruitment — and, ideally, extends well beyond a lawyer's departure from the firm at the end of his or her employment.

While the immediate return on investment from a law firm's alumni program may be difficult to measure in numbers, it's worth reminding ourselves how fostering relationships with the firm's former lawyers through an organized alumni program helps create a growing community of advocates who know the firm well, can share in business development activities around the globe, and proudly promote the loyalty and goodwill of the firm to help attract top candidates and clients in the future. Whether your law firm is in the infancy stages of alumni program development, re-

launching a dormant program, or looking to take a program to the next level, to reap these and other benefits alumni programs can provide, be sure to keep the best practices discussed in this article in mind and don't lose sight of the importance of internal communications and organizational buy-in.

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Engaging Your Alumni: Ideas for Every Law Firm Budget

by Sheri Askinazi and Erin Core Kinsella

Maintaining good relationships with alumni can help build your firm's business, boost recruiting efforts, and more. Law firm alumni lead busy lives, however, and it isn't always easy to capture their attention. Whether your alumni program is a stand-alone department with its own budget (lucky you!), or your outreach is more ad hoc, there are a variety of ways you can engage alumni and build relationships that will last a lifetime.

Get Online

Websites are great tools for promoting a sense of community among your alumni. It's not enough simply to park a page online, however; visitors are more likely to return to sites that offer useful tools and updated information. Consider posting timely news about alumni accomplishments, profiles of interesting alumni, events calendars, and other dynamic content. A searchable database that stores current contact details, with participants' permission, also can be a valuable resource.

If building and maintaining a high-quality website isn't in your budget, don't worry — the Internet offers plenty of other low- and no-cost options. For starters, take a look at your firm's own website. Can you work with your PR team to feature alumni-related news and events or showcase select alumni accomplishments? Talk to your firm's web administrators to see if the firm is using search engine optimization (SEO) technology to its advantage so that the firm is first to appear when people Google "[your firm] alumni."

Does your firm or alumni program have a presence on Twitter, LinkedIn, or Facebook? Setting

up social media profiles is free, and maintaining them doesn't have to take a lot of time. On LinkedIn, you can establish an "official" invitation-only alumni discussion group for your firm. With a Facebook profile page, try searching for other Facebook users affiliated with your firm.

Of course, email is another tried-and-true method for reaching alumni, but remember to be selective and keep track of opt-in preferences. You'll make more of an impact with infrequent emails containing relevant content rather than by "spamming" alumni with meaningless messages.

In-Person Networking

Online networking is powerful, but there's no substitute for personal interactions. If you have the budget, think about hosting after-work receptions for alumni in specific regions or practice groups. Events featuring prominent alumni as speakers, either solo or as part of panel discussions, also can draw crowds.

These types of events don't have to break the bank. Your firm might host smaller groups of alumni at breakfast events, perhaps featuring roundtables on select industry topics. Look into the events your firm's practices, diversity networks, interest groups, and other internal teams, like professional development, are already hosting. Could you collaborate with those teams to save some seats for alumni? Partners welcome the opportunity to reconnect with alumni, so keep them in the loop — they might know of upcoming events of interest to their former colleagues.

Learning Experiences

Your alumni learned a lot from their time at your firm — why not keep this relationship going by serving as a source for continuing legal education? Hosting a CLE event, such as a panel discussion capped off by a networking reception, is sure to engage alumni. If you don't have the resources for a big-budget event, get creative: consider targeting smaller sets of alumni by teaming up with individual practice or interest groups, or piggybacking on an existing CLE seminar hosted by your professional development team, a collaboration that can benefit your firm's lawyers and alumni at the same time.

In addition, many firms may have an e-learning library offering online CLE opportunities. Check with your professional development colleagues to see if it's possible to invite alumni to log in.

Keep in mind that even if you can't host these sessions on your own, you still could engage alumni by serving as a source of information about CLE and other relevant seminars in their area presented by bar associations, law schools, and the like.

Keep It Personal

Above all, alumni engagement is about personal connections. The best way to ensure that alumni keep your firm in mind is to offer a name and a face to associate with your program. Whenever possible, have a representative from your alumni or events team show up to events in person to greet alumni. When you send emails or other correspondence, sign it with a designated firm representative's name. Never miss an opportunity to be engaging — your efforts will pay off.

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