

Corporate Alumni Network Engagement 2015 Research Report

Includes Special Supplement: The Community Engagement Playbook
A prescriptive playbook on how to better engage your Corporate Alumni Network

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Introduction

The benefits of having a growing, thriving corporate alumni network are many—brand advocacy, business development, recruiting cost savings, and network intelligence, to name a few. However, realizing this value is a direct result of how effectively you create and maintain engagement with your members.

Conenza's *Member Engagement Research Report* takes a closer look at the topic of member engagement within corporate alumni networks. It highlights the key findings of a survey of corporate alumni program leaders from around the world.

The *Member Engagement Research Report* features:

- The definition of “member engagement”
- Metrics used to measure member engagement
- How engaged are members of corporate alumni programs today?
- Challenges facing companies as they attempt to further engage their alumni
- Member engagement tactics being employed by the world's leading programs
- **Special Supplement:** *Community Engagement Playbook*—A prescriptive playbook on how to better engage your corporate alumni network

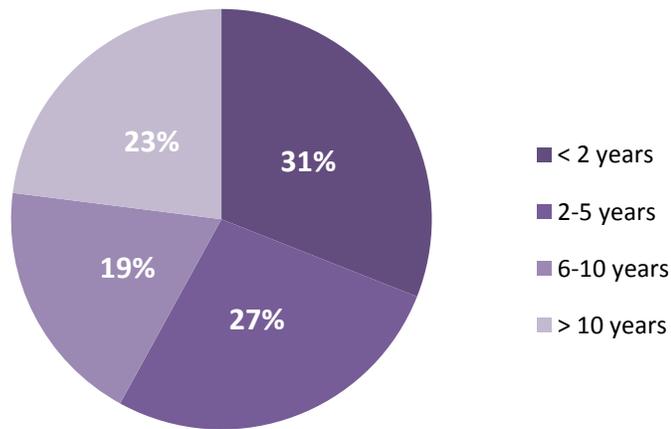
We hope that this report provides you with actionable insights and a pathway to more engaged alumni.



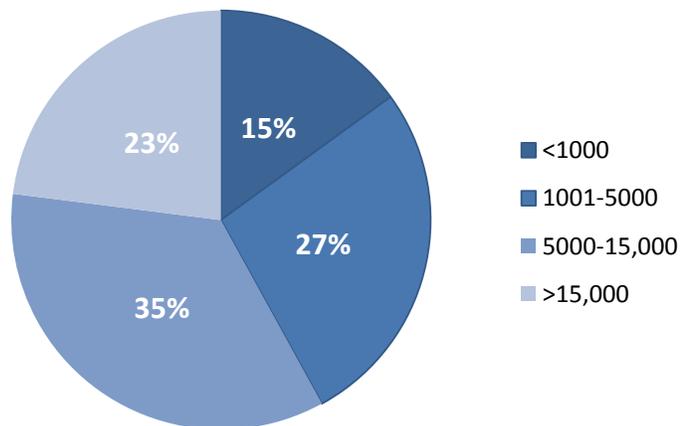
Survey Demographics

The Conenza *Corporate Alumni Engagement Survey* was completed by close to 25 leading programs from around the globe (Conenza clients and non-clients) in January of 2015. The ages and sizes of the corporate alumni networks we surveyed varied. Respondents also came from a wide range of verticals including professional services, technology, financial services, higher education, and government.

Age of Corporate Alumni Networks Surveyed



Size of Corporate Alumni Networks Surveyed





Defining and Measuring Member Engagement

Some companies define engagement as simply providing an email address and profile details to the network. Others take a deeper look at alumni participation in different aspects of the network (events, newsletters, job opportunities) and the business impact

of this participation. These metrics tend to fall into two different categories: network ROI-related and tactic-related. Below is a sample of the metrics that leading companies are using within each category:

70% of corporate alumni leaders are measuring member engagement

Sample ROI- and Tactic-Related Metrics

Network ROI-Related Metrics	Tactic-Related Metrics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New business opportunities• Referral rates• Rehire rates• Marketing value/reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Registrations• Website visits• Email campaign metrics (opens, clicks)• Event attendance• Survey feedback• Online participation (discussions, connections, content consumption)

How Important is Engagement & How Engaged are Today's Networks?

Our research confirmed that driving alumni member engagement continues to be one of the leading priorities for corporate alumni programs today. Engaged alumni can help amplify the value that is created from the community right from the start. This also helps create an engine to fuel future growth. Engaged members are more likely to share the network with others, and new members are more likely to join and become active in the community. While engagement remains a big priority, our research uncovered that most corporate alumni leaders feel that their programs have a lot of opportunity for improvement in this area in particular.

92% of corporate alumni leaders said alumni engagement is a top priority

23% of corporate alumni leaders were happy with current levels of engagement



Five Effective Tactics for Driving Engagement

Five key tactics surfaced for engaging alumni.

1. **Events:** Surveyed alumni leaders cited online events as the most reliable method to engage members. While nothing takes the place of face-to-face connections at events, online events are proving to be a highly-effective tactic.
2. **Relevant and Consistent Communication:** Communicating with alumni members when they want, how they want, and with the information most important to them, is a proven approach for earning the trust and attention of your members on an ongoing basis.
3. **High-Quality Content:** Content reigns king when it comes to engaging members of corporate alumni networks. Today's leading programs create and share a broad range of content types (video, text, images, etc.) with their members.
4. **Access to Professional Development and Networking Opportunities:** Providing alumni members with valuable resources for continued professional development and ways to expand their networks online and offline ensures members remain connected and involved.
5. **One-to-One Outreach:** Another common theme that surfaced is the desire to surprise and delight corporate alumni members by adding personalized communication to the alumni outreach mix. Whether that entails picking up the phone to extend a special event invite to a member, or sending a personal note on their birthday, these personal touches go a long way.

Five Leading Challenges for Creating an Engaged Alumni Network

Alumni engagement can be difficult to achieve and sustain without focused attention through the life of a corporate alumni program. The most common challenges fall into five categories.

1. **Maintaining Accurate Contact Information:** Data is key to the success of corporate alumni programs as it allows you to segment, target, and engage users for talent acquisition efforts, business development, and much more. Corporate alumni leaders are looking to streamline the capture and maintenance of member data over time.



2. **Producing Compelling Content & Events at Scale:** Creating great content and planning meaningful events at scale can be tricky, especially with limited resources. Corporate alumni leaders need creative ways to increase the quality of content and events they produce to support their engagement efforts.
3. **Time and Resources:** Gaining executive support for dedicated corporate alumni resources can prove difficult, although based on the increase in the number of programs it may be getting easier. Building scalable, repeatable processes with minimal resources is a key challenge and focus for alumni teams.
4. **Capturing Alumni Time and Attention:** In an increasingly digital and mobile world which offers a multitude of information and channels competing for an individual's mindshare, corporate alumni leaders struggle to capture the time and attention of their target alumni.
5. **Internal Awareness and Support:** A big factor in maximizing the value of an alumni program is integrating the program into the fabric of the organization—from creating a culture that values alumni and a lifelong relationship with employees, to incorporating the alumni network into business processes. In a highly competitive corporate environment with many competing priorities, fostering awareness and adoption of a corporate alumni program can be a challenge.

Priorities for 2015

Based on the above findings, it makes sense that corporate alumni leaders consistently discussed these key areas of focus for the coming year:

- Increasing the number of face-to-face and online events
- Enhancing and personalizing communications and content
- Improving the quality and usefulness of member data

These leaders also agreed that improving alumni engagement metrics and measurement should be a top priority.

If you would like more information on this study or would like to provide feedback for future reports, please contact us at info@conenza.com.

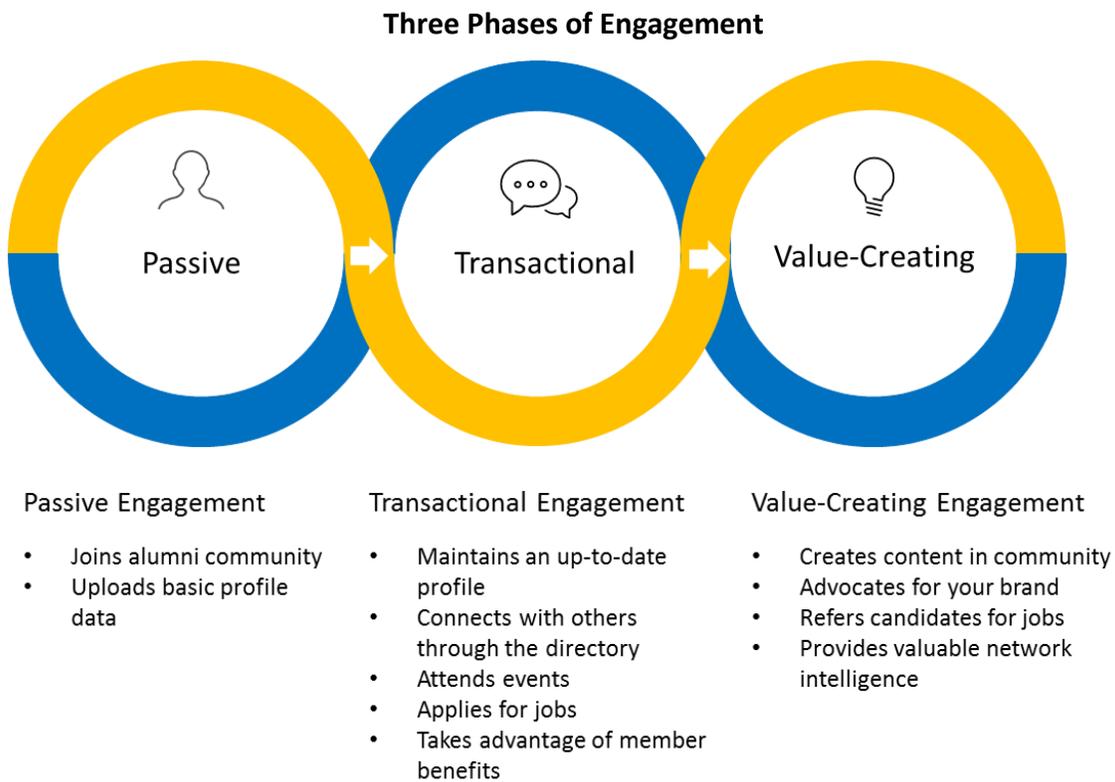


The Community Engagement Playbook

A prescriptive playbook on how to better engage your Corporate Alumni Network

Defining Engagement

As we saw in the survey results, the definition of engagement can vary widely from company to company. At Conenza, we believe there are three key phases: passive, transactional, and value-creating. As corporate alumni management professionals, we strive to move members through the different stages of engagement as we develop and nurture alumni relationships.



In the pages that follow we will provide you with best practices for driving corporate alumni engagement to move more members from passive to value-creating participants in your community.



Best Practice #1: Know Your Audience

The people who have joined your corporate alumni network are already a very special group of people. They have already heard your message, believed it, and have taken the conscious action to join. In order to continue engaging with members in a meaningful way, it's important to know who they are.

Basic demographics are often not enough, although they are a good starting point. A 55-year-old early retiree will likely not be interested in the same things as a 55-year-old with 3 children in university looking for his next job. Why have these people decided to maintain a connection, and what do they want from this relationship? What are they really passionate about? Wine? Technology? Photography? Seeing their old friends from the office? What are their perceptions of your organization and how does that impact your key metrics, ROI and business drivers?

Gathering this type of information is important in determining how best to engage your alumni and critical in segmenting and targeting users to create more value for members and your business. Below are three ways you can approach gathering this information.

Robust Profile Data

Robust member profiles are at the heart of any successful corporate alumni network and can be achieved using a few different approaches:

- Make it easy for users to populate their profiles (*direct profile updates, import from LinkedIn/Xing*)
- Augment profile data with internal data (*HRIS systems, CRM systems*)
- Supplement profile data with third-party data sources (*D&B, Hoovers, Data.com*)

Research & Surveys

Sometimes the best way to get people engaged is to ask what they want. This can take a variety of forms from a simple survey during the exit process or poll on the alumni website to in-depth focus groups. Involving your members in the definition of your community, member benefits or types of communication provides a great first step.



Passive Data Collection

Data can also be gathered passively. Allowing users to self-select into interest groups or by tracking their activities through web analytics, event attendance, or other methods this data can be captured with minimal impact to the alumni member. This type of data gathering often leverages technology to garner insights, and as such can become part of the daily processes of learning from and engaging with your membership.

Best Practice #2: Create and Share Great Content

To keep your alumni engaged, always try and creating and share fresh, interesting, relevant and exciting content. It can also be one of the most time-consuming aspects of managing and marketing your corporate alumni network. Below are strategies to keep in mind when putting together a plan and associated processes for capturing and distributing great content.

Create Targeted Content Experiences

When we know our population (Best Practice #1), we can accurately target content on what appears to them to be an individual basis. Segmenting your content to distinct users groups can be a very important and effective way to engage different corporate alumni constituencies (retired executives, clients and prospects, priority rehires, etc.)

There are multiple ways to create unique and differentiated experiences within the greater community through segmentation. Here are just a few:

- Create private, invite-only online groups where target segments can connect and collaborate
- Leverage dynamic targeting of content based on predefined user criteria (i.e. a marketing executive logs in to the network and lands on the homepage where she sees marketing industry research and a marketing meet-up in her area)
- Develop and distribute targeted communications that aggregate and highlight content that would be of interest to specific member segments
- Produce and promote invite-only events (online or in-person) for targeted participants
- Leverage role-based access controls to deliver unique user experiences (content, features, communications) to important audiences



Repurpose, Repurpose, Repurpose

The secret to getting the most out of your content efforts is to constantly think about how what you are producing can be repurposed into something new and different, saving you time and furthering your investments. For example, if you produce an online event for your alumni, turn the key points of the event into a blog post. Capturing short video interviews at live events you host for your alumni can be another great way to take advantage of efforts that are already happening to create compelling content.

Successful programs also look across their organization to tap into content already created for customers, prospects, and internal employees. This provides a great funnel of interesting, timely and relevant information for your alumni.

Corporate Alumni Love Alumni Stories

Over the years, we have found that "Alumni Stories" or "Alumni Profiles" are one of the most popular pieces of content within our clients' corporate alumni networks. Alumni members love to hear about what their former colleagues are up to. Here are some tips for capturing great alumni stories:

- **Build a Great List of Questions**

To create an easy and repeatable process for capturing alumni stories, we recommend building a standard list of interview questions. These questions can range from "Where are you now?" to "What do you miss most about working at our company?" Include questions that allow alumni members to share both professional and personal aspects of their lives and interests. Readers tell us this is the most engaging subject matter.

- **Create an Online Submission Form**

You can create a simple online submission form that allows alumni members to conveniently submit feedback for an alumni story. This can be done by using online survey software (e.g. Survey Monkey, Survey Gizmo). Conenza includes this functionality as part of its corporate alumni solution.

- **Promote the Ability to Submit Alumni Stories**

You would be surprised at how many people are open to sharing their stories, if asked. To fill the funnel with alumni story ideas, be sure to promote the ability to submit stories throughout your online corporate alumni network, in alumni email communication, and at alumni-focused events.



- **Recorded Phone Interviews**

Having a quick conversation with an alumni member over the phone and recording it can be a great way to capture an alumni story. The recording can easily be transformed into a written piece or it can be edited and packaged as an online podcast, or both!

Build an Editorial Calendar

Every good content marketing program starts with a carefully planned editorial calendar. It's the execution plan for integrating great content into a cohesive and engaged community. You probably won't follow it verbatim, but if it exists you'll be far more consistent and successful at publishing the items you need and generating the engagement you want. Your editorial calendar should:

- Provide a tentative outline of when different pieces of content will publish on the platform, and via which syndication and social channels
- Clearly articulate cadence; that is, the date each piece will be developed and distributed. Publishing in a consistent, timely fashion is critical
- Outline key audience segments, aligning content with appropriate interests and expectations
- Be designed in a way that promotes and encourages actions that support the key business drivers behind your alumni program

See the great article by the Content Marketing Institute below for tips on creating an editorial calendar:

<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2014/11/content-marketers-checklist-editorial-calendar-essentials/>

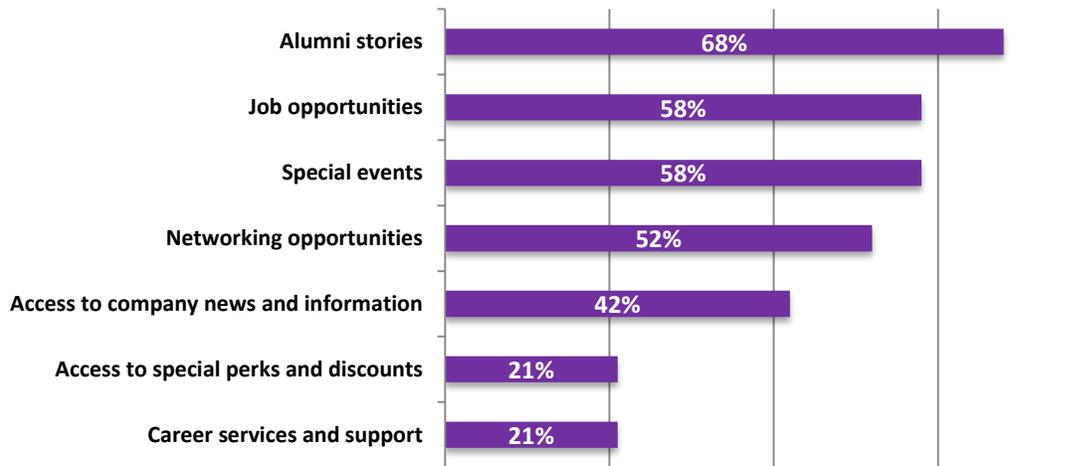


Best Practice #3: Drive Engagement Through Benefits

Most companies thinking about alumni programs focus on the ROI or the benefit it can provide to the company. While vital and certainly a core reason why companies launch alumni initiatives, the best programs balance the value proposition to the company with the value to its alumni. This value proposition keeps alumni coming back to the community time and time again. As you enhance the benefits, you'll see a direct impact on alumni participation, engagement and ultimately ROI.

In a recent benchmarking study we asked corporate alumni network leaders what benefits were most popular with their former employees. Alumni stories, job opportunities, and special events were identified as the most popular, followed closely by networking opportunities and access to company news.

Most Popular Benefits with Corporate Alumni



Beyond the job opportunities, networking, and professional development that are at the heart of most successful communities, here are some great examples of compelling alumni benefits:

- Telstra extends great discounts on cell phone plans to their alumni
- Microsoft provides their alumni with access to the "employee-only" company store, Office 365, and Passport discount card
- Citi offers access to great travel discounts to its alumni
- Accenture extends referral discounts to its alumni members for referring great talent



Conenza has dedicated significant resources towards building a portfolio that its clients can take advantage of to expand company-driven benefits, including a marketplace where alumni can get discounts on products and services, and a wide range of healthcare and financial services.

Best Practice #4: Hold Online and Offline Events

As we saw in the research, events remains one of the most reliable methods to drive member engagement. Successful strategies often include both online and offline events.

First we will take a look at in-person events. Nothing beats shaking hands, sharing a drink and laughing with old friends and colleagues that you may not have seen in years. Many of the most successful corporate alumni programs integrate some level of face-to-face interaction into their alumni engagement efforts. What kind of events you host and how often you host them will depend on your population and what you have learned about them. If your members tend to be older retirees for example, they may not be early adopters or even casual users of technology. In fact, they may only check email. For these members, in-person events are the only avenue to creating this meaningful and interactive experience.

While some alumni organizations do throw large extravagant parties, it's certainly not necessary. These can take the form of a simple happy hour, a panel discussion, or a speaker around professional or personal interests such as photography or art. One approach that can potentially save you money is to include alumni in existing company events. You will have the opportunity to highlight alumni accomplishments while with—and since leaving—the firm. Empower alumni to create and host their own events, whether those are funded independently or not.

In the online arena we increasingly see companies offer compelling webcasts for their alumni community. These provide opportunities for continuing professional development, access to industry research and news, executive interviews, and much more.



Best Practice #5: Deliver Relevant Communication at a Regular Cadence

Relevant email communication at a regular cadence is key to creating ongoing member engagement. Here are some steps for enhancing your alumni messaging strategy:

- **Create a Cadence for Communication**

For most corporate alumni communities a monthly or even quarterly newsletter is a great place to start. What's most important is having a schedule that your alumni can count on. For example, you would not want to go three months without sending an email and then send three emails in one week. If you are communicating too often or your content is not relevant, you'll see that reflected quickly in click-through rates and unsubscribes.

- **Email Testing and Optimization**

In the digital marketing realm there is so much we can do to test, measure and optimize the email campaigns we send to our members. A/B testing headlines, experimenting with from lines, testing different designs and content approaches, and what time during the week or day you are sending messages can help you hone in on what works best with your audience.

- **Target and Segment Your User Base**

Just as we referenced in the content section of this paper, taking a targeted approach to delivering content to your community can be one of the most effective ways to optimize the effectiveness of your communication. Segmenting your lists and delivering content that will be of interest to these unique segments should be top of mind.

- **Triggered Communication Based on Preferences**

Automated notifications can be a great and non-resource intensive way to facilitate user communication based on preferences. Allowing users to set filters regarding type of information and frequency creates a win-win for both users and administrators. Users receive communication on their terms and administrators do not have to deploy a wide range of different email tactics to make this happen. It's all automated.

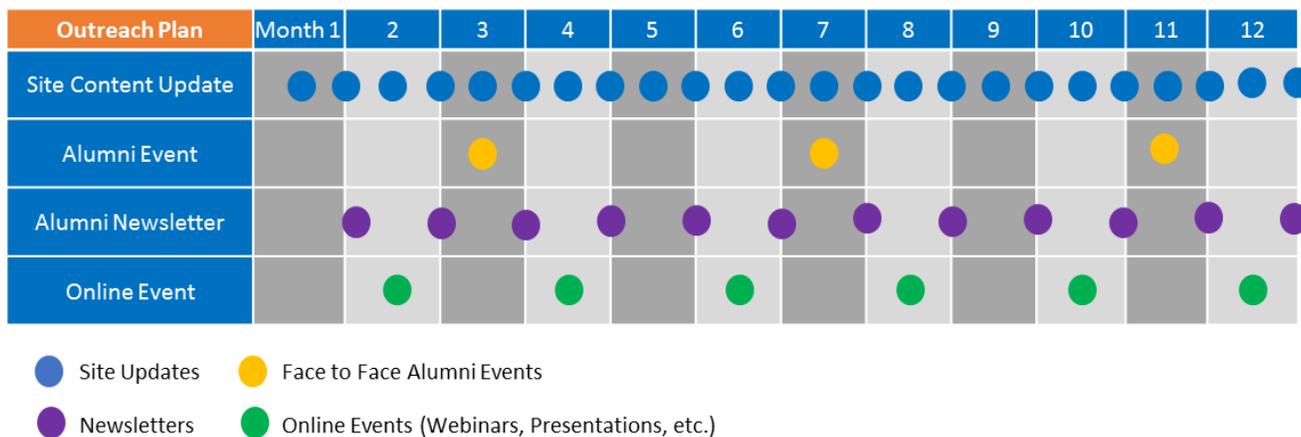
- **Develop a Strategic Communications Calendar**

Just as it is helpful to map out your content calendar or editorial schedule, a strategic communications calendar is a great way to get organized around the different types and timing of messaging you will have going out throughout the year. Having a comprehensive calendar ensures that you do not overlap



communication for global and regional outreach. Log metrics directly into the calendar so feedback remains housed in a central place and campaigns can continually be improved and optimized. Below is a sample communications calendar from a very engaged community. This model can be used as a starting point to create your own calendar based on your program’s requirements.

Sample Communications Calendar



Best Practice #6: Focus on Metrics for Measurement

Today’s world —particularly online— is a battleground for attention, eyeballs, and ultimately users. While it is generally understood that engagement will help an organization get that attention, specific definitions and measurements are often overlooked. It doesn’t have to be overly complex. We have found that focusing myopically on two or three key metrics, at least initially, proves more than enough. At some point during business case development, a methodology for measuring engagement and ROI should be determined. These key metrics should be used to track and measure that ROI. By connecting these key performance indicators back to the business case, you also ensure that your definition of engagement and the daily activities promoting that in your community point directly to core business drivers. Below you will find a few sample metrics that we have seen leveraged by leading corporate alumni programs.



Sample Business and Community Metrics

Sample Business Metrics		
Business Development/Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alumni-driven referrals/leads Alumni-enabled revenue 	Recruiting/HR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rehires from community Referrals from community Reduction in COBRA costs 	Retained Access to Know-Who/Know-How <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research efforts leveraging the community New ideas sourced and resourced within the community
Sample Community Metrics		
Community Growth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registered members Active members Growth year-over-year Penetration: registered vs. total available members 	Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique visits, page views Page views/visits Repeat visits Time-on-site Member-contributed content Connections made Messages sent Event attendees 	Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outbound activities Events Outreach Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open/ click-through rate Bounce rate End actions

Best Practice #7: Leverage Technology to Help Drive Engagement

We have outlined several critical areas that can help you drive member engagement and move members from passive to value-creating participants in the community. At first glance this may be daunting, but the good news is that technology platforms and additional services are available to help. Here are a few areas where it can help make these efforts easier and more streamlined:

- Creating a Unique User Experience via Segmentation & Targeting**

Corporate alumni management platforms can make it easy for administrators to create unique segments of users and target content to these individuals based on who they are, whether via the online platform or email communication.

- Content Management & Sharing**

With a robust content management platform at the heart of your corporate alumni program, you can easily create and share multiple types of content with your audience, from text-based content to video and images.



- **Data Normalization, Quality & Management**

More and more alumni management programs are relying on technology solutions to help them manage data more effectively, and to ensure the data is complete and normalized so it can be better leveraged to create value. These features can range from simple import functions from social networks to more in-depth integration with internal enterprise systems and third-party data sources.

- **Automated Communication**

As mentioned above in the communication section, automated notifications and preference-based messaging can make the job of an alumni manager much easier and the experience of users much more customized.

- **Multi-Channel Engagement**

An alumni management platform enables you to easily and effectively engage users via multiple channels—online via multiple devices (desktop, laptop, mobile phone and tablet) and via automated and scheduled email communication.

Conclusion

We hope the research and best practices highlighted in this playbook will help you develop and evolve your strategies and tactics for driving member engagement and moving more members from passive to value-creating participants in your community. Moving members along this path of increasing value results in brand advocacy, business development, recruiting cost savings, and network intelligence.

For more information, please contact us at info@conenza.com.