

Get the student experience right and you will probably have engaged alumni. Fail to do so and they may be lost for ever say **Andrew Crisp** and **Sarah Seedsman**

Keeping the connection

The fourth *Alumni Matters* study run by CarringtonCrisp and supported by EFMD surveyed more than 6,000 alumni worldwide. The study found that dissatisfaction with the student experience leads to exceptionally low levels of alumni engagement (4%) and connection (8%) compared to those satisfied (58% and 63%). Poor ratings of faculty quality and lack of intellectual challenge are key drivers of dissatisfaction.

For many business students, motivation is all about career outcomes. However, fewer than half the alumni in the survey describe career support at their school as good, falling to 38% among MBAs. Less than one quarter agree that “the careers team helped me find a good job on graduation”.

The emotional side of the alumni relationship

While alumni transactions are relatively easy to measure compared to emotional relationship, it is often emotion that drives engagement. Most alumni feel both positive towards their business school and proud to be associated with it, providing a deep reservoir of goodwill for schools to draw on.

Disappointingly however, less than half then agree that “the school enables me to contribute to its success”. Of major concerns is that fewer than half the respondents agree that they feel engaged or connected to their school, are part of a community or have a sense of belonging.

Why does this matter? While only 45% of all alumni are willing to donate to their school because they are proud of it, this rockets to 75% among engaged alumni.

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Help me understand to help me give

Philanthropy is becoming increasingly important as a funding stream for many schools but they need to make it easier to give financial support if they are to be successful in raising income.

Just over half (57%) of alumni say it is “a little unclear how to support the business school financially”. A further 15% indicate it is difficult to make a contribution and 3% find it impossible and have given up trying.

Despite the difficulties alumni face donating, only one in four indicate there is no circumstance under which they would support a financial appeal. The two most important reasons that alumni indicate are most likely to make them consider giving are:

- If I better understood the impact of my gift
- Once my income has reached a certain level

Both reasons reinforce the critical need for effective fundraising communications. For schools focused on creating a stronger culture of philanthropy, increasing participation and creating a habit of giving among new donors, there is a need to stress that any size of gift helps.

Improving communications to help alumni to better understand the potential impact of their gift should be easier. Business schools have many opportunities to create compelling messages to inspire donors. They need to use them.

Over 6,000 alumni from 24 business schools and living in 115 countries participated in *Alumni Matters* 2015. Copies of the full report can be purchased online at carringtoncrisp.com/alumni_matters, along with details of how to participate in next year’s study. *Alumni Matters* is one of five annual studies conducted by CarringtonCrisp and supported by EFMD as part of the **businessschool.guru** series. For more information, please contact Matthew Wood by email at matthew.wood@efmd.org

The alumni network

Communication between school and alumni is important. But for the alumni it is often the network that is key. Less than half of the survey respondents think their school has a good alumni network.

Only one-third of respondents agree that their school is good at maintaining and building the important relationships formed during time spent studying together.

Although there is much more broadcast communication to alumni, schools are not seen as effective in helping facilitate contact between alumni. The top three methods for maintaining contact with fellow alumni are social media sites, personal links and luck. Four times as many alumni use other social media sites to contact fellow alumni compared to those using official school social media channels.

Alumni communications: a priority improvement

Not surprisingly, alumni would most like to receive communications about alumni benefits, services, news and events. More surprisingly, alumni are least interested in current students and their activities, the Dean’s vision for their school and news about the wider university or institution.

Despite a reasonably healthy level of interest in a wide range of topics, rankings of the effectiveness of communications in each area are more sobering and indicate significant need for improvement. The weakest areas of performance are communications about executive education opportunities, students and the Dean’s vision.



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