Seven Top Tips from Corporate Alumni Leaders

Practical advice from some of today's leading Corporate Alumni Programs

We recently hosted an event that brought together thought leaders from some of today's most innovative and effective corporate alumni program, such as McKinsey, Citi, Microsoft and Telstra, to discuss strategies and best practices for building, sustaining, and engaging an alumni network. This event was full of actionable information and insights on how to create and enhance alumni engagement. We wanted to share the top tips we garnered from the event.

1. Integrate Your Corporate Alumni Program into the Exit Process

Companies like McKinsey are tightly integrating their corporate alumni programs with their exit processes. As employees exit, they're automatically welcomed into the alumni network. Providing an "opt-out" process instead of an "opt-in" approach has several benefits. Welcoming employees into the Corporate Alumni Network as they are transitioning:

- reaffirms your employment brand
- makes it easy for your alumni to participate
- enables you to maximize participation
- avoids lost connections

It also ensures that all the valuable data you captured about your employees during their tenure can flow directly into the community as they exit. This data can then be leveraged to inform and improve their alumni experience.

2. Leverage Executives to Raise Visibility for Your Community

Your executives can play a key role in marketing and growing your community. As the voice of your company and its initiatives, they can passionately convey the value your organization places on creating lifelong relationships with its employees and the benefits of staying connected to alumni. Telstra provided a great example of this strategy in action, as their CEO has played a pivotal role in the successful launch and growth of their community by creating a welcome video, attending alumni events, and more.

3. Think Global, Act Local

One of the key objectives and challenges for large multi-national companies is how to create a globally consistent and locally relevant corporate alumni program to engage former employees around the world. Citi provides an excellent example of this. They consolidated multiple regional alumni efforts into one global network using a single online platform. However, they still effectively serve regional audiences with locally relevant content in 24 different languages. Want to learn more about the Citi Corporate Alumni Network? Learn more in this customer profile.

4. It's All About the Benefits

Most companies thinking about alumni programs focus on the ROI or the benefit it can provide to the company. While this is important, and certainly a core reason why companies launch alumni initiatives, the best programs balance the value proposition to the company with the value proposition to its alumni. Beyond the job opportunities, networking, and professional development that are at the heart of most successful communities, our expert panelists shared some great examples of creative 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.
- Citi offers access to great travel discounts to its alumni.

As you enhance the benefits to your alumni, you're bound to see a direct impact on alumni participation, engagement and ultimately ROI.

5. Engage with Events

Events are a pivotal part of a successful corporate alumni program. They provide an important forum for corporate alumni to stay connected, informed and engaged throughout the year. We have seen alumni event strategies of all shapes and sizes. Our experts recommended a mix of on- and offline events; social, professional-development, and philanthropic events; and annual global as well as more frequent regional gatherings.

6. Content, Content, and More Content

Content is a key to keeping your alumni engaged. Our corporate alumni experts reinforced the importance of keeping content fresh, interesting, relevant and exciting. They also shared a secret to getting the most out of the content you produce – constantly think about how you can repurpose or repackage content that you are producing to leverage it in multiple ways. For example, if you produce an online event for your alumni, turn the key points of the event into a blog post (similar to what we are doing here). 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. Finally, some alumni want to tell their stories and most want to read the stories from their fellow alumni. Encourage them. The more alumni stories that are told the more that will want to participate.

7. The Importance of Having an "Official" Network

Our expert panelists from McKinsey, Citi, Microsoft and Telstra all believed in the power of open social networks like LinkedIn and Facebook. They recommend leveraging these forums to attract and engage your corporate alumni. But when it comes to effectively creating, managing, and realizing value from a formal corporate alumni program, they felt a secure, branded network is the only way to go. You have control over the branding, the user registration and approval process, and the privacy policy. You also own all the data within the community and can integrate internal applications with the alumni network to facilitate business processes.