

Successful Alumni Outreach – Tips and Techniques

Camp Alumni often have a real connection with camp. They are a great resource for their time (volunteer days, board membership) and treasure (donations). In addition, alumni may make future decisions on if/where to send their children to camp.

However, it is important to foster these relationships so that they can be fruitful. There are many tools and techniques available to help camps reconnect with their alumni.

Data Collection and Management

Clean, searchable, up-to-date data of your alumni is crucial to maintaining relationships with a large alumni base. There are both offline and online processes to help you collect and manage your data.

- Offline: Use board & other alumni to find and reconnect with alumni
 - Case Study: URJ Eisner Camp
 - Had a large database of alumni (6,000 records), but only 300 known good addresses
 - Undertook a huge effort (led by an alumni committee) to get updated information.
 - This was a key priority defined from their strategic planning process.
 - The Committee was also motivated by their 50th anniversary event, which was looming in the future at the time.
 - Appointed ambassadors to pitch the camp to 60 of 91 congregations in the Northeast US. They made sure registration materials were available, were a contact to answer questions, etc.
 - Result: 2000 good addresses in database
- Centralized database
 - Whether it is a fully functioning donor/gift database or an excel workbook, all alumni data should be maintained in one centralized location. It must also be backed up regularly and updated consistently to ensure it is up to date and accurate.
 - Ideally, a donor management system (DMS) like DonorPerfect Online (DPO), eTapestry, or Sage Fundraising 50 should be used to manage your alumni and donor data.
- Moving Paper Records to Electronic Records
 - There are services that can inexpensively translate paper camper registration, donor history, alumni, and other forms into electronic spreadsheets.
 - JCamp 180 can recommend a service.
 - Various camps have taken advantage of this type of service:
 - Cohen Camps
 - Avoda
 - Ramah Poconos
 - URJ GUCI (Mark Kram)

- Also hired a company to scan the data from index cards (30 years+ of records ONLY on these index cards)
 - Scanned data could then be sent to translation company
- 3rd Party Tools for finding updated contact information for existing electronic data
 - Alumnifinder.net, Harris Connect, other
 - Can go back as far as 20 years and/or 6 address changes
 - NCOA
 - Recent (within 2 – 3 years) Change of Address information
 - Directory service from Harris Connect
 - Harris Connect will take a list of alumni from a college, university, or other organization (camp!) and contact them persistently (including direct phone calls) to get updated contact information and other information requested by the organization.
 - This data is given to the organization to update their alumni contact lists.
 - Harris Connect will sell a print alumni directory to the alumni who are interested. This defrays the cost of the effort.
- Alumni registration form on website to collect contact information
 - Every camp should have an online form for alumni to fill out to be added to contact lists and update their contact information
 - There are simple, cheap (or even free) webforms available. For example: Google Spreadsheets or Wufoo forms.
 - It is a best practice to promote the form through your various communications channels: eNewsletter, Facebook Page, etc.
 - Some donor management systems offer forms that are directly integrated with your database. Contact your DMS provider or the JCamp 180 Technology Program team to find out if this is an option for you.
 - **Key Takeaways:**
 - Make available an easy, obvious way for alumni to register and update their information when they visit your website.
 - Welcome anyone who submits their information (a thank you email? Or a list of the things they can expect from camp – eNewsletter, event invitations, etc.).
 - Store the data in your donor database. Make sure you remove duplicates!
- Collect Alumni information on Camper Registration forms
 - Include a checkbox or other question on camper registration forms to allow parents to denote that they are alumni of the camp
 - This information must be forwarded to the alumni coordinator (or whoever manages your donor management system) to be incorporated into the alumni/donor database.
- Use Refer-a-friend option on website/eNewsletters to find lost alumni
 - You can include a link on your website or eNewsletters for alumni to refer their own friends to get back in touch with camp.
- Use Contests to reconnect and build your database
 - Best memory, old photos, where are they now?, etc.
 - Way to get alumni excited about the camp again and also to get more names in the database
 - Example: Tamarack Camps had a viral email contest to get more alumni in their database and find people interested in getting involved. Offered simple camp prizes.

Reconnect/Cultivate

Once up-to-date alumni data is available in a centralized database, camp must use it to communicate and reconnect with alumni. There are various ways to build community and reconnect with alumni:

- Newsletters/eNewsletters
 - eNewsletters allow you to reach a large number of people with regular updates at low cost.
 - Camps have a wealth of stories and news to provide to their constituents – personal stories of current campers, staff, and alumni; information about programs at camp; plans and dreams at camp; etc.
 - If a camp doesn't want to ask for money from alumni immediately, a subtle reminder/link can be placed in the sidebar to mention campaigns and ways to give.
 - More newsworthy announcements of fundraising campaigns (annual, capital, scholarship, legacy) can be highlighted later.
 - News/solicitation best practices:
 - Find focal points to cultivate/solicit alumni – for example, alumni could focus on redoing a bunk or building a new playground. Consider: what is important to THEM?
- Events
 - Events help remind alumni of their days at camp, as well as reconnect them with old camp friends.
 - Camp Family Days, Camp Alumni Days even bring alumni back to the camp itself to see what's new, what's still the same.
 - Can hold events at various cities around the country where alumni reside. These bring alumni together. Regular events can grow interest and the number attending. Examples:
 - B'nai B'rith Beber Camp sets up a number of events each year and then sends a large magnet with all events (including events all around the country) listed.
 - Camp Ramah in the Berkshires has a series of 3 on 3 basketball games in selected places in New York throughout the winter at various skill and intensity levels.
 - Herzl Camp sends out a list of events taking place across the country in their annual newsletter that is sent to all on their mailing list.
 - Camp Ramah in Wisconsin has begun having “send off” breakfast parties when parents drop their kids off at buses to send to camp. Like a simple tailgate, they offer bagels and similar light foods. As many as 500 people attend! Alumni and parents sing camp songs and reminisce of their own 6 hour bus trips to camp.
 - Surprise Lake Camp uses their vibrant Facebook community to promote events primarily to and for the Facebook community. Has had a few successful informal “bar nights,” brought in new people to their database, and even solicited a \$5000 gift from an alum who reconnected via the camp Facebook Page.
 - They have multiple unofficial Facebook groups as well as an official Alumni Association group for advertising events and posting actionable news.
- Social Media
 - Can use Social Media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, etc. to reconnect with alumni and build community. Alumni are already using these tools to reconnect with old friends.
 - Facebook is the most obvious platform at this time – 500 Million users and growing.

- In addition to Facebook Pages, other strategies can work, depending on your specific alumni:
 - Camp Sabra created a 70's alumni Facebook *Group* – 500 people joined the group within 3 weeks or so.
 - B'nai B'rith Beber Camp created a *MySpace* group and also collected ~500 people in just days or weeks
- More camps are using Twitter to reach out to alumni and other constituents as well.
- Blogs
 - Blogs are an easy and inexpensive way to easily share photos, videos, personal stories, and even audio (podcasts) with Alumni and other constituents. They can read the information at their leisure and even subscribe to feeds to get updates sent directly to them.

Case Studies –Best Practices in Alumni Outreach

- **B'nai B'rith Beber Camp Ambassador Program** – This program is primarily focused on camp recruitment. However, the ambassadors also reconnect with alumni, find volunteers, and solicit donations while they are out in the field. As a result of this process, they estimate that their \$6,000 investment (mostly travel expenses) resulted in as much as \$600,000 in new revenues (enrollment, donations, etc.).
- **Small College Model** – Small colleges like Amherst College recruit volunteers from individual classes to find and reach out to their classmates. The Development Office/Alumni Coordinators manage the volunteers, prepare materials/"kits" for them, and track their progress. The office can focus instead on major gift solicitations.
 - Consider class/year associations, bunk associations, and geographic associations to segment your alumni.
- **Alumni Associations**
 - Some camps have a separate Alumni Association not integrated with the camp
 - Each camp should decide if a separate Alumni Association or an integrated alumni outreach effort works best for them. Either can work as long as the camp can have access to contact data to continue to maintain connections with their alumni.
 - Membership fees?
 - If an Alumni Association is implemented, the camp must decide if membership fees should be charged and what benefits alumni will receive with their membership.
- **Branded Credit Cards**
 - Camps can now get camp-branded credit cards (as colleges have been offering for years).
 - Constituents use the credit cards and the camp gets a small percentage of all purchases.
 - There are a couple of options that are free for the camp and have no annual fee for the credit card holder.
 - <https://www.cardlabconnect.com/AffinityPortal/indexAction.do>
 - <http://www.cardpartner.com/>

Case Studies –Best Practices in Alumni Outreach using Technology

- **Herzl Camp**
 - Herzl Camp was not engaged with their alumni for a long time, but in 2009 they made it a priority as part of their overall outreach strategy

- In 2009, they organized their first alumni reunion in years and strategically utilized technology to promote it:
 - A great alumni blog that includes guest blog posts from alumni.
 - A twitter account mostly focused on alumni relations; initially it was primarily used to promote the reunion itself.
- Herzl Camp also implemented an online registration form integrated with their Donor Management System (DPO) to collect updated contact information.
- Finally, Herzl Camp uses eNewsletters to reach out to their constituents. They are trying to segment content to their constituents (i.e., an eNewsletter to donors about the progress of their new construction).
- **Takeaway:** Herzl Camp considered their overall strategy and outreach goals and then found tools to help them reach those goals.
- **URJ Camp Harlam**
 - URJ Camp Harlam does a nice job engaging on both Facebook and Twitter. Not only do they offer good content (pictures, updates, contests), but they are very responsive and have learned how to build community on these sites.
 - Camp Harlam also does a nice job collecting “Where are they now” stories about their alumni. These stories are sent out in alumni-focused eNewsletters.
 - Camp Harlam also implemented an online registration form integrated with DPO to collect updated contact information.
 - **Takeaway:** Camps don’t have to master every technology tool to be effective. URJ Camp Harlam went where their constituents were and learned how to use those platforms to engage most effectively. They also incorporated personal stories and pictures to reconnect emotionally with alumni.
- **Camp Morasha**
 - Camp Morasha had no history of connecting with alumni.
 - In 2009, however, they implemented a number of procedural and technology changes to re-engage their alumni base:
 - Camp Morasha allocated specific time in a staff person’s job to focus on alumni outreach.
 - This new staff person updated the camp website to include lots of interactive features to engage alumni:
 - A form to update their contact information.
 - Photo albums
 - The ability to post comments and suggestions on the website.
 - Camp Morasha also held their first Alumni event in years at CitiField in New York City. Almost 400 people registered for the event.
 - They used Alumni-focused eNewsletters and their new Facebook presence to get the word out about Camp and the event.
 - **Takeaway:** Alumni are ready to be engaged, but you have to make the effort. Camp Morasha had no history of alumni outreach and very little alumni data. But they prioritized alumni communications and worked towards a specific goal: their alumni event at CitiField. They also used the tools available to them to foster relationships online.