

# Fundraising Well



**A newsletter about fundraising effectively in today's world**

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## Editor's Note

Do you have a clear view of your donor and prospect activity across all fundraising programs (annual giving campaigns, events, etc.)? With the ability to track and record more and more information, it's difficult to choose the proper benchmarks for evaluating the success of your organization's campaigns.

In this issue of Fundraising Well, [Robert Burdenski](#) explains how to benefit from "connecting" your fundraising efforts and shows us what information we should really be tracking about donors. While aimed specifically at alumni programs and annual giving, the following tips apply to fundraisers from all areas.

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## Evaluating Your School's Alumni Program

By by Robert A. Burdenski

I often ask the schools I visit how they decide if it's been a good year or a bad year for their alumni relations program. The answers can be far-ranging, with their evaluations usually based on the number of paid alumni dues members, or the number of event attendees — or just the number of events, period.



They're frequently dissatisfied with their own answers. The same five percent of their alumni may be the ones that come to every event. The dues program may be important to the school's alumni relations budget, but is the dues program helping to sustain (or increase) alumni good feelings about the school? And while the arrival of the Internet has brought many more opportunities for "connecting" with alumni, few schools have come up with the benchmarks for measuring its effectiveness.

For schools that are specifically seeking connections between alumni involvement and alumni giving, there are additional obstacles. The alumni dues membership data may reside on a completely different database from the fundraising database, and information about individual event attendees may not be tracked on any database at all.

It's a problem worth solving. Too many alumni directors measure their success in terms of doing more, when working smarter may actually result in connecting with more. As our databases become capable of storing more types of data — and more versatile in communicating with each other — new opportunities are emerging for a clearer understanding of what our alumni are involved with, and how they prefer to fit us into their lives.

At the same time that alumni programs are seeking better measures, many alumni annual giving programs are relying less on broad mass-marketing appeals, and are increasingly eager to quickly learn who has affinity, and who's seriously interested in philanthropy. Knowing who's involved and what they're involved in is a good start.

It's a logical and necessary evolution. For the first time, you will be able to see how each graduate prefers to sustain and express his or her own affinity with your institution. You'll begin to understand which of your activities actually impact the most alumni, and if you add an attitudinal survey to the mix (see the list), you'll be able to see the relationship between the strength of their involvement and the strength of their good feelings.

Alumni programs will benefit from clearer information about who they're "connecting" with, and the annual giving office will be able to see who still has strong feelings for the old alma mater. And both will be more likely to have a "good year."



## How Are Your Alumni Connected To You?

by Robert Burdinski

You can build a very detailed profile of your alumni if you're keeping the right data and know how to get it out. In addition to the usual demographic information, here are some additional things worth tracking:



- **Alumni Association membership status** – Are they annual members, or dyed-in-the-wool lifetime members?
- **Giving history** – Beyond gift amounts and gift dates, is this a consistent annual donor, or one that we attract only occasionally – perhaps at reunion time? Has he/she continued to give or allowed donations to lapse?
- **Giving interests** (designations) – What can we observe about alumni giving interests and motivations?
- **Volunteer involvements** – How do they volunteer their time on behalf of the school?
- **Event attendance** – What do they come to, and are they same people who come all the time?
- **Reunion attendance** – Is class affinity a point-of-reference for them?

- **Email address and email newsletter readership habits** – We’re increasingly sending email information to alumni. Are they opening it, and are they reading it?
- **Class notes submitted** – We do a great job of publishing class notes for their fellow alumni, but how accessibly are we storing the notes for ourselves?
- **Phonathon call information** – The only person-to-person contact many alumni will have with your school this year is via your phonathon. Are you taking the time to learn about them, or are you simply processing a transaction?
- **Survey information** – Schools are increasingly using surveys to directly ask alumni about their favorite teachers, favorite experiences, giving interests, attitudes about the school and future planned involvements.

#### About the author:

**Robert A. Burdenski**, principal of [Robert Burdenski Annual Giving](#), is a nationally-recognized consultant in annual giving fundraising, having served more than 100 clients since 1994. Mr. Burdenski has more than 18 years of experience working with colleges and universities, hospitals and other not-for-profit organizations to improve their annual giving performance, using a variety of data analysis tools, program evaluation and planning methods, and best practice examples collected through his years of consulting work. The author of **Innovations in Annual Giving**, published by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, he also serves as the moderator of the popular email list [FUNDLIST](#).



#### Latest and Greatest

▶ **Meet this month's author!** Robert A. Burdenski will be presenting at this year's Blackbaud [Conference on Philanthropy](#) — a three day networking and professional development event for nonprofit professionals. **He will be presenting the session [Sources of Funding: Innovation in Annual Giving](#).**

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