

ABSTRACT: EVALUATION AND USAGE OF DIRECT MARKETING CAMPAIGNS IN ALUMNI CONTACT

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INTRODUCTION

Research in fund raising proposes that university alumni giving is correlated to scholastic achievement, age and income, as well as student satisfaction. Most research in this area has been conducted by analyzing alumni office data, either within or across universities, to find correlating factors to alumni giving. These studies were mainly based on readily available alumni databases. Alumni giving is a key source of income for most colleges and universities (Stutler and Calvario 1996). Alumni giving is also an important aspect in determining the reputation and quality of colleges and universities in this country. Given this importance of alumni giving to universities and faculty, it is not surprising that many researchers have explored the reasons why alumni give to their alma mater (Taylor and Martin 1995). In order for alumni to be willing to give and to be informed of events at their alma mater, contact with alumni should be continuous and considered beneficial by the alumni. The purpose of this research is to empirically examine the reactions of alumni to different methods of direct marketing contacts from their alma mater.

METHOD

A phone survey was conducted of a wide cross section of alumni ranging from graduates from 1995 to 1950 with a representative regional and major distribution. Overall 150 students completed the survey. The parts of the survey relating to direct marketing consisted of measurements of any overall preference for email, phone, or mail contact, a rating of the mailings, the number of mailings, and mail, phone or email contact. The study explores among other things the success of the direct mail, email, and phone contact with the alumni. Alumni evaluated the quality and frequency of direct marketing contact with the college and their usage of it.

Findings should improve future direct marketing contact with alumni.

FINDINGS

Alumni rated mail, phone or email contact with their alma mater on a scale of 1 least desirable to 6 most desirable. The significantly preferred method of contact was mail (mean 4.46), followed by email (mean 3.11) and finally phone (mean 1.97). Unemployed alumni rated phone contact lowest and mail contact significantly higher than the employed or retired alumni. Overall 45.3% of the alumni rated mail contact as the most desirable contact, only 6.7% rated email and 5.3% phone as the most desirable way to contact them. Phone was rated as the least desirable by 56% of the respondents, email by 27.3%, and mail by 11.3%. The results were highly significant and consistent across demographic variables aside from the employment status mentioned above. Respondents were also asked to pick one method of preferred contact overall and 75.3% selected mail, 10% email, 5.3% other, 4% phone, and 2.7% internet.

Considering the importance of alumni contact, it becomes clear that the method of contact is very important to alumni and universities need to address alumni preferences. Alumni should be given a chance to choose the contact method and possibly the frequency of contact. Respondents also rated the number of mailings they currently received. 32.7% rated the number as just right and another 34.7% as just a little more than needed. The mailings were read regularly by 64% of the respondents. The mailings content was also rated on a scale from 1 (poor) to 6 (excellent). Alumni gave the mailings a mean rating of 4.58, with 14.7% rating the content as excellent and 42.7% as one scale point below excellent. The majority of respondents read and quite liked the mailings. This would be another important piece of

information that alumni offices need to collect on a regular basis to provide alumni with the information they want when they want it and finally in the format that they prefer.

CONCLUSIONS

In this case the overwhelming majority of alumni preferred mail contact over any other kind of direct marketing contact. This may not be generalizable to other alumni groups, but the research shows how important it is to include alumni in the choice of contact that they would prefer. Giving alumni more choices regarding method and frequency of contact, as well as preferred content will be an important task for universities interested in maintaining an alumni database and using that database to deepen the relationships with their alumni over decades to come.

REFERENCES

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