Every alumni event is much more than just a friendly meet-up—it has the potential to bring in great rewards for your school.

That’s why it’s imperative to ensure that your alumni event is a successful one, one that draws a robust attendance rate and one which effectively engages every attendee.

What long term benefits do alumni events foster? Below are several for starters.

Benefits of Successful Alumni Events
Successful alumni events produce a ripple effect of positive benefits for your institution.

Faithful alumni become a source of financial partnership for the school. They may support the school’s key fundraising needs or contribute to special scholarship funds.

Alumni are your brand ambassadors. When alumni speak positively about their former school, it boosts the school’s reputation among their connections and the society at large. This promotes the school’s image to prospective students and their families, encouraging more students to attend.

Connected alumni are a rich resource of marketplace connection. About 80% of people still find jobs through networking. (Source: CareerBuilder.com) Networks between alumni and new graduates, then, are one excellent means of connection.

Alumni give back to the school by serving on advisory committees and boards, providing relevant knowledge and experience to guide the school’s future direction. They also provide internships opportunities that help train future graduates and ease the transition between the classroom and the workplace.

All these benefits provide even greater incentive to build a great alumni event. Here’s how to do just that.

**How to Build an Impactful Alumni Event**

**1. Set Up a Clear Event Goal**

First, define the key purpose of your event in specific terms. Your event goal clarifies your overall direction and helps keep your planning and programming on track to achieve what you want. Check that your goal is both narrowly defined and measurable. This makes it achievable and easy for you to evaluate.

Establish performance indicators to help you track your goal progress. For example, are there certain registration numbers you desire by a set date? How many alumni do you want to see sign up to become mentors for students? How many social media shares are you aiming for?

In your goal planning, design a checklist of things to do along with a timeline of when each item needs to be done. Include follow up tasks,
2. Make the Event Especially Meaningful for Alumni

It takes more than the opportunity to see old faces to motivate alumni to attend your event. If alumni are going to reserve time and make the effort to travel to your event, it better be worth their while.

Offer a meaningful program. For example, invite an influential speaker to discuss a pertinent topic, or organize a joined charitable volunteer activity for alumni to participate in.

**Alumni are most engaged at an event where the program is relevant to them, and where there are people in attendance whom they know.**

Ensure that in your event marketing, your excellent program is clearly outlined. As a bonus, list the alumni who have already committed to be in attendance, especially high profile alumni such as past student government officers and former student leaders.

3. Design for Higher Attendance

Pre-emptively resolve reasons why alumni would not attend. Start by making a list of potential excuses. The most common ones include: “inconvenient timing,” “no childcare,” “lack of attractive program,” “travel inconvenience,” and “fear of new social situations.”

**After finding out all the reasons for alumni to refuse your invitation, design your program to target and overcome those excuses.**

For example, give invitees plenty of advance notice, so they can schedule time to attend. Outline travel and parking options, so attendees know how to reach the venue by public transit or by car. Make the event accommodating for spouses and children. Let alumni know which other familiar classmates or old connections will be in attendance—this can be easily done through a Facebook event page or other digital event page, where interested attendees are listed.

4. Target Diverse Age Groups

Among alumni in attendance, there will be people from a broad range of life stages, with diverse needs and interests. To create an engaging event
for everyone, you will need to consider the perspective of each age group and make all groups comfortable.

To do so, seat alumni according to graduation years, or plan separate events altogether for older and younger alumni.

Let different age groups be well represented on stage, for example, by inviting both older and younger alumni to emcee or to speak.

5. Capitalize on Alumni Passions

Dreams, passions and pursuit of life goals are what resonate among alumni of every age group. Celebrating these unites alumni with a common sense of achievement.

Every alumni has stories of how their school journey has prepared them for their life journey. Capitalizing on these stories—for example, by highlighting them through videos, print materials, or speeches—encourages a shared enthusiasm for the pursuit of happiness that every alumni is embarking on.

Pride in the place where they’ve graduated also brings alumni together. Try featuring a video recap of how the school has developed, updates on recent changes to the school, and student and faculty awards and achievements. It can inspire alumni to feel even greater pride in and connection to their school.

6. Offer Stress-Free Networking Opportunity

People who attend alumni events are seeking three things: inspiration, information, and interaction. (Source: Marquette University) Interaction with other alumni connects people to networks and opportunities that can open new doors in the marketplace.

Although networking is one of the most valuable benefits of an alumni gathering, almost 60% of people commonly feel shy and unsure of what to say during networking events. (Source: Stanford University)

By organizing structured networking activities, you can alleviate some of the stress of open social mingling.

Structured networking activities can be as simple as question cards for every table with easy questions to ask one another, or timed “speed networking” shuffling among groups.
7. Be Creative and Effective in Program Choices

Bring in some variety and creativity in planning alumni events. Trying different event styles can also help you discover which types of activities are most engaging and effective for your particular school.

Here are some ideas to consider:

· Luncheon with short program

· Early morning breakfast meeting

· After-work casual reception with short program

· Weekend family-friendly brunches

· Annual banquet with musical performance

· Outdoor BBQ with sports

· Lakeside potluck picnic

· “Football Night” or “Hockey Night” viewing party

· Themed costume parties

· Charitable group volunteering

8. Set a Friendly Tone

From on the onset, a friendly and approachable tone in your invitations can go a long way in making alumni feel welcomed to attend.

Including some one-line testimonials from attendees saying how they benefitted from past alumni meet-ups will also serve to entice invitees and show them the value of your event.

How you welcome guests when they arrive establishes the tone and mood for your event. Have ushers ready to greet people at the door. Better yet, find out a little bit about your attendees, and introduce them to people they can talk to.

9. Foster Easy Conversation
Provide name tags as a convenient way for people to interact with one another. Design and print your nametags professionally to give a sophisticated look to your event. **To add a touch of playfulness, give attendees a chance to personalize their nametags with a short tagline that introduces some aspect of themselves.** This information also serves as a jumping point for conversations.

Next, create an atmosphere that encourages mingling and conversation. A snack and drinks bar, for instance, promotes better flow and movement than a sit-down dinner. **Set up areas for natural gathering**, such as counters with food, long tables with school photos, or walls displaying student art. These spots naturally draw crowds and foster easy conversation.

Use icebreaking games or other light activity to help people warm up and meet new friends. When playing, you can divide people into groups and add a little competitiveness—it instantly builds teamwork and increased connection.

If you spot any shy or lonely attendees, make an effort to introduce them to someone else and help them feel included.

**10. Start Well, End Strong**

Whereas the opening of your event is key to a great first impression, the end of your event gives attendees the lasting impression that they will take home with them.

At the beginning of your event, give a brief official welcome and outline the program so people know what to expect. Towards the end, thank everyone for coming and announce upcoming events so people have something to look forward to. This is also a good time to collect contact information and feedback. You can also gather early registrations for the next event and offer a discount on the ticket fee as a motivation to sign up now.

Lastly, let alumni know where to view event photos online and how to find your association on social media, so that they can stay connected until the next meet-up.

Planning an event is hard work. **Let us take care of the framework so you can focus on the shining details. Eventgrid is your solution for mobile-friendly event pages, integrating iBeacon technology, social media marketing and more. Talk to us today for a free demo.**