Case Study: Oxford Falls Grammar School

toucantech

About Oxford Falls Grammar School

Oxford Falls Grammar School, located on the Northern Beaches of Sydney, is currently home to 1,200 students and has over 30 years experience educating young lives. The school ethos is based not only on achieving the very best results for their students, but also creating a positive community of faith and support. As their Principal Dr Peter Downey explains, Oxford Falls Grammar gives their students a place to learn to "do life well", and it is exciting for them to be able to continue the conversation and see them supported through their new alumni community.

All things community development and alumni are done part time term time by just one person! They launched their ToucanTech community site in 2019, and a third of all their alumni are signed up already within a year of launch. From planning reunions to sharing the great successes of their alumni, the OFGS alumni community is a hive of activity and continues to grow as they populate their site with even more fantastic content and features.

> *"It sounds ridiculous but ToucanTech is my Alumni manager. Without it I would invest more than double my time on planning, creating, executing and measuring Alumni programs and I've barely scratched the surface of making the most of all the included features."*

We caught up with Merryn Parks who manages the Alumni and Community at Oxford Falls Grammar School to find out how her alumni engagement strategy has transformed, and her top tips for launching a successful digital community.

OFGS Community Stats

Launched alumni network with ToucanTech: **July 2019**

7000 reads/hits across 28 new stories

60% of all alumni with an email address have signed up to the online community

74% email open rate for online community members

95% of class of 2020 signed up to the online community after promotion in school

Sent **over 400** donor thank you notes

Merryn Parks
Alumni and Community Manager at Oxford Falls Grammar School

How did you get started with your online community?

Before using ToucanTech, we had limited opportunities to engage with our alumni, as the data we held in spreadsheets was unorganized and a chore to keep updated with our email system. We didn't have any dedicated channels to start sharing alumni stories and our LinkedIn pages needed attention. Plus we didn't have a reunion strategy in place, due to very little resources and limited contact details!

I had been collecting current leavers and recent graduate personal details for a few years prior to launching our ToucanTech community, as we knew at some point, we'd like to set up a place for everyone to interact and stay in touch. At launch I knew I needed to have enough compelling content to ensure Alumni were getting value for signing up. I added a variety of news items (across key staff news, building news and of course alumni stories), photo galleries and events To raise awareness I primarily used mass emails (via ToucanTech) to drive sign ups, promoting different content elements of the site. Reunions are a great way to get people

excited about interacting with old classmates, so when we promote these, we find more people sign up to register for the event. Some of our staff that were also alumni or parents of alumni also helped to add a few extra sign ups - it was all about spreading the word and using as many 'owned' channels as possible! We had no marketing budget to promote and advertise our new community and we still managed to sign up 25% of our Alumni within 2 months of launch!

Since we have set up our alumni community, we ensure that each year of school leavers are introduced to our alumni community by holding a group session to give them an overview and demonstrate the benefits of joining the online community - we make sure to do this before they get too distracted by end-of-year exams and celebrations! It's been very successful so far, with 95% of our recent class cohorts signing up.

What are your top tips for getting people to engage with your content?

Using the right channel is important; we've had real success with our email updates, achieving a 60% open rate across all our email campaigns. But the biggest impact came through segmenting our audience; with the ToucanTech filters we can do this easily now, so we always segment between members and non members. For mass emails to non-members, we rework these so we can prompt them with additional encouragement to sign up to join the community.

We also send alumni stories such as interviews to the relevant audience when they are hot off the press; we've found that using subject lines that include people's names are really effective to drive individual sign ups so that they can read a story about one of their year-group peers. I always think about what the next step is on the engagement ladder for specific groups to take and then consider how I can tailor my content accordingly.

How did you gather so many alumni stories with such limited time??

Follow every lead. Ask everyone who makes contact. Not all of them will want to, not all of them will always turn out to be great stories but the content will be interesting to their peer group. If someone signs up for a career panel, ask them for an interview. If a staff member mentions something, follow up for an interview. I have a set list of questions to pick from and generally do the interviews over email to save time. Keeping your ear to the ground on staff conversations about past students is quite fruitful and I have a great Head of Senior School who always remembers to pass leads to me. As I only work part-time and do it all, I also am big on repurposing content that has been published in other media or channels. For example, if a digital newspaper or website has a feature on an alumni, I will re-publish it on my website with credit and link to the original source.

What's next for your community?

We're planning to introduce a mentoring section to help connect alumni to current students and connect alumni to each other. My pre-launch work includes using ToucanTech forms to garner interest from Alumni about speaking to students about their careers. I am hoping these Alum will become ambassadors and lay the foundation for my mentor database. Earlier in the year I was able to quickly source a panel of alumni to speak to our Year 12s about future career paths simply by setting up an event on the site and sending

an email campaign. It was a great result. I easily confirmed people available when I needed them (no back and forth calls) for the event and the database automatically tagged their record with the engagement, event acceptance and my correspondence with them.

We are also looking at introducing a dedicated careers section of our website, which will pull through our clubs for different industry groups and share job listings through our network of alumni all across the world. We are already finding examples of how cost-effective and efficient it can be to have close access to our alumni network: when we needed to hire for an IT position earlier in the year, we sent one email to a targeted group of our alumni and hired a Class of 2017 alum within the month! No cost, very little time spent recruiting and an excellent candidate being supported in the early stages of their career.

"We educate students for a life in the 21st century and we've been improving the school's-built environment with that purpose. It only made sense we remain connected to our graduate alumni after they leave us with a solution fit for that same future. We could see ToucanTech was that solution, and one year on we are pleased we took the plunge as their first Australian customer in keeping us connected."
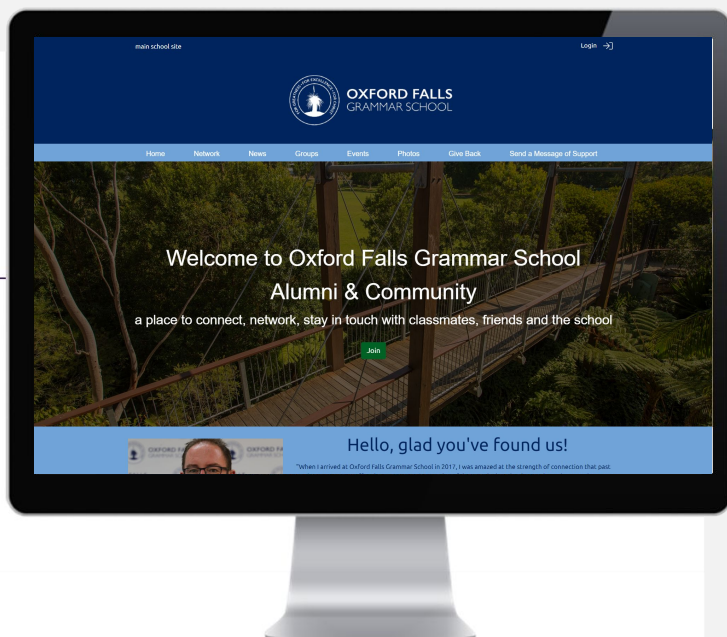
- Dr Peter Downey, Principal, Oxford Falls Grammar School

About
toucantech

ToucanTech is a community database software used by schools, companies and charities for alumni, careers, fundraising and marketing activities. Combining a flexible website and a powerful back-end database, it's an easy-to-use, all-in-one system.

Database
Import, filter, search and update records, create custom fields, forms and run complex reports

CRM
Track activity, measure engagement, capture consents, create postal labels, sync emails

Community
Connect your members (e.g. alumni, parents, supporters) on a private network, synched with social media

Email
Create and send beautiful email newsletters, tracking open stats, remove bounced emails, manage unsubscribes

Fundraising
Process and log donations, set up funds, log tax relief, run reports, track donors

News
Publish news stories and other content, tag people and share on social media

Gallery & Resources
Post photos, artwork, year books, magazines and tag, categories and share

Events
Plan your dinners, reunions and concerts, send reminders, book tickets, process payments

Mentoring
Feature mentors, post jobs, publish careers guides and news, allow students/ alumni to search for mentors and track interactions

Clubs/ Groups
Set up sub-groups within your network, with their own news and events