

A group of four diverse students are sitting on a wide stone staircase in front of a large, multi-paned window. They are all smiling and looking at a laptop held by the student on the left. The student next to them is holding a tablet, and the student on the far right is holding a book. The scene is brightly lit by natural light from the window.

# The Final Countdown

A guide to welcoming your final year students into your alumni community

Class of 2021

 **toucantech**



# The countdown is on...

Your final years are fast approaching their final terms at school. Whether you're saying goodbye virtually or in person, here's how to **welcome them into your alumni community** and get them signed up to your online platform in the next 6 months!

The last year has demonstrated just how important connecting online can be for wellbeing, education and opportunities. An online alumni platform gives you a secure, private portal to engage your alumni, with a **built-in CRM and database**. Alumni can join clubs, sign up to events and connect with fellow alumni to reminisce or network. Using an all-in-one system to collect alumni details means that unlike social media, **you own the data** and can collect the most relevant information. With a private portal, you avoid social media algorithms that are impossible to predict, while giving your alumni a **space to connect with each other** and stay up-to-date with your school.

This guide contains lots of tips to get your final year students signed up - from getting students to register on their phones during their leavers' assembly, to sharing words of wisdom from your older alumni - so **start today** to begin a lifelong connection with your class of 2021.

## How to use this resource

Whether your final year student's final terms are spent virtually or in person, these last months are a brilliant opportunity to engage your class of 2021 before they leave. Each month there is a new tactic to focus on, to help sign up your class to your platform. By encouraging your alumni to sign up ahead of their departure, you will **engage a greater number of your graduating class**.

It's helpful to start the sign up process early for your alumni platform, as this avoids a rush later in the year to persuade leavers to sign up before their school email addresses expire.

“

To create a sustainable alumnae network, you need to engage the current school community before they leave the school. When students depart to university, they often stay in contact with girls at the school and advise them on their university choices. Once they start their first jobs, they know they can tap into a huge network of alumnae who will offer them mentoring and careers advice.”

**Jenny Blaiklock**, Director of Development, Lady Eleanor Holles, London, UK



# 6 months to go

## Give them a reason to connect

Invite existing alumni to share their own stories of connecting through your alumni community.

Introduce your community with real life stories from your alumni. By showing them that their fellow former students are enjoying being a part of your school's alumni community, and are benefiting from the experience, you are proving the value of joining.



Hearing directly from alumni will get students thinking about the opportunities available to them.

You can recruit alumni to help in different ways, such as:

- Asking them to post a friendly comment on your forum to welcome the new class to the alumni community
- Asking alumni to come into school or stage a virtual event to talk through their career journey and experiences since leaving your school
- Creating online university groups (if these don't already exist) and asking recent alumni of those universities to post their experiences there.
- Staging an online networking event, such as a virtual coffee with 'break-out' groups
- Set up former students as pen-friends with final year students, to share a postcard/letter
- Run a series of virtual coffee/teas with old boys/girls and final year students, to reflect on their time since school and how far the alumni network has supported them



# 5 months to go

## Reward them for joining the programme

Give a token gift to welcome students into your alumni community

Whether it's a leavers' hoody or yearbook, incentivising your graduating class with a small gift to sign up is a gracious way to welcome them into your alumni community.

Branding the gifts with your emblem helps keep the school in mind when they set off to work/ uni/ travel - particularly if they can take the item with them. Surbiton High School gives all leavers a branded rubber duck and encourages alumni to send back selfie-photos with the duck! With this in mind, longevity is key when choosing products!



Think practical, think premium, and make it personal.

Other ideas for branded merchandise:

- Bound notebook with school crest
- A tie/ cap in alumni association colours
- A commemorative coin
- Everyday items like a reusable tote bag, umbrella or laptop case
- Something quirky like a school teddy mascot, a beautiful year-group photo book or a funny alarm clock

Think digital; ways to celebrate alumni online:

- A LinkedIn badge of your alumni crest
- A branded 'frame' for profile pictures on social media
- A personal email signature banner promoting their alma mater



Though the class of 2020 missed out on their traditional experiences, [Solihull School](#) has made every effort to connect with this class in new ways. They sent a special gift to each alum that joined their online alumni network, as a reminder of their time at the school.

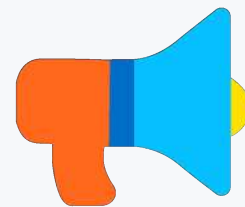


[Wells Cathedral School](#) achieves 95% engagement with their leavers, and presents all leaving students with a personalised Life Membership Token, a lovely gesture of lifelong friendship, support and community.



# 4 months to go

## Engage leavers via the alumni community



Invite your final years to their end of year events through your alumni platform

Whether it's a leavers ball or graduation that your final years are eagerly awaiting, inviting them to book their tickets through your alumni platform will incentivise sign up rates.

Using your online community to organise and promote your events is a great way for alumni to come together, whether that's virtually for now or at reunions in the future.


Here's how you can promote your events:

- Send out invitations via email from your all-in-one system
- Ask year-group reps/ ambassadors to share the link with their peers
- Share the event link to your social media groups and from any other school websites
- Share updates on the event on as announcements on your community site

**Encourage engagement with comms and consent preferences at this stage**

While your 2021 leavers set up their online profiles in your alumni community, why not capture their opt-in for future communication?

If you want to fundraise from alumni in the future you might want to take this opportunity to gather consent from your leavers to send them occasional email updates about school fundraising projects.

A faint, stylized rose icon in the background.

[Berkhamsted school](#) used their alumni site to invite leavers to their End of Year Ball, posting updates from their prom committee to the site!



[Tonbridge School](#) quickly adapted to virtual events, using their ToucanTech portal to organise exciting online activities such as a live film awards night and a virtual choir with the entire school singing the school song.





# 3 months to go

## Co-create Class of 2021 content

Collaborate with your final years to produce content for your alumni site

Posting exclusive content behind a log-in encourages students to sign up to check it out.

### User submitted content

Ask your final years to submit content to your platform, for example: a short introduction to themselves, where they'd like to be in 5 years time, and their favourite school memory.

Interesting content ideas:

- Experiences of different universities from an alumni perspective
- Graduation or prom photos
- Link to a leaver's video
- Farewell messages from teachers
- Predictions of where they'll be in 1 or 5 or 10 years' time - which can be used as a 'hook' to re-contact the year-group in the future! These predictions can be 'fun' - e.g. most likely to be living on a remote island/ saving the planet/ running for elected office etc



### Calling all creatives!

If you have students in your final year group that are already passionate about writing, videography or photography, why not invite them to contribute to your school alumni community?

Delegating content generation

Conversely, well-connected leavers could be given responsibility for encouraging fellow students to upload pictures to a Class of 2021 gallery, or collecting quotes or anecdotes to share in community groups.



### Top tip!

Ask your Head Boy/Girl or any student ambassadors to submit their introduction, and they can share this with the rest of their year group!

Student ambassadors at [Watford Grammar School for Girls](#) posted articles to provide support and show familiar faces.



# 2 months to go

## Establish a mentoring scheme

### Set up a mentoring programme

One of the best ways to welcome your new alumni and provide an opportunity for continued engagement could be through a mentoring scheme.

You can start this once your final years officially leave, or during their final year so that alumni can give advice on work experience and personal statements.

When asked about planned alumni engagement activities for their 2020 leavers, 65% of development professionals in our survey planned to set up a mentoring programme as a way to support and engage with their alumni.

### Mentoring programme starter kit

Here's a starter kit to getting your mentoring programme off the ground:

1. Ask for volunteer mentors from your existing alumni network. A good time to get in touch could be those that have recently graduated from university, or those that have lots of experience in competitive industries such as law and medicine.
2. Add new categories to your mentoring options that will appeal to your final year students, such as 'Personal statement advice' and 'Work experience'.
3. Publish a 'Best practice guide' to explain how to make the most of the mentoring experience for mentees.
4. Introduce the mentoring programme to your final years in an assembly or workshop, where you can talk them through the platform and answer any questions. If possible, ask a few of your mentors or mentees to talk to students about what they got out of the experience.
5. Ask for feedback from mentees and share positive anecdotes on your alumni site to encourage further engagement.



### Get the old boys and girls involved

Why not invite one of the older school alumni to record a video message for final year students, explaining how much they have gained from maintaining alumni connections over the years?

#### [Tonbridge School](#)

advertised mentoring talks specifically for their recent leavers on their alumni site.



# 1 month to go

Get personal & give a reason

Ensure that your leavers' details are up-to-date!

Many students will sign up with their school email address, meaning they are unavailable to be contacted after their addresses expire. Collecting their personal email address, and updated home address if they are moving, will save lots of admin time later down the line and ensure that you can keep in touch.

You can set up a quick notification to pop up whenever students log in to ask them to check and update their details. You can also use this as an opportunity to check their consent preferences, so you send them the most relevant communications.

You may also want to set a date for a **'just left meet-up'** - for example a pub drinks in the Christmas holidays when a lot of alum are likely to return from their 1st term at uni

## Give leavers a reason to leave their personal data behind

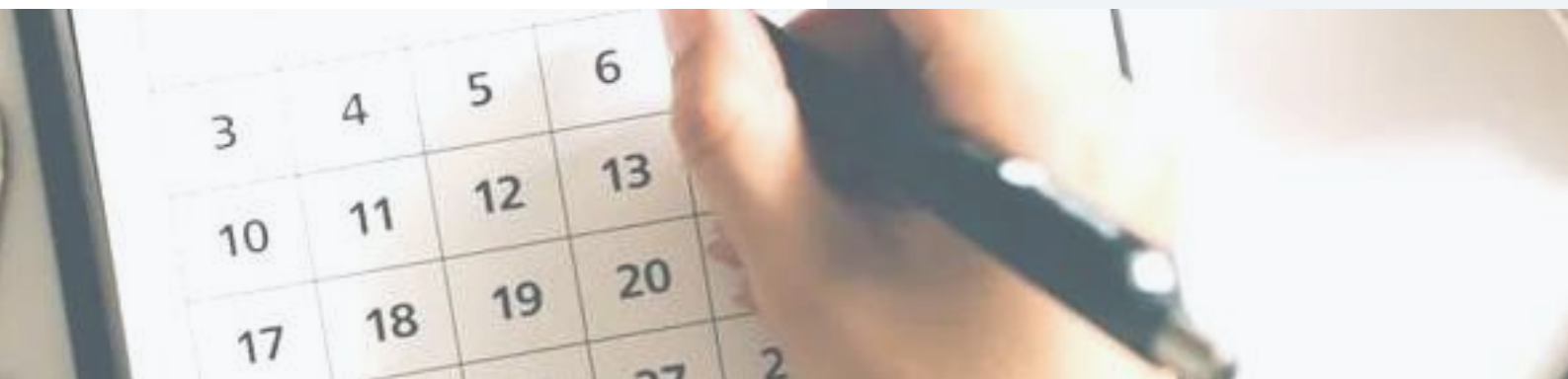
When asking students to share personal details, it's important to make it clear why the school wants to store this information, and what it will be used for.

Sharing a list of reasons that benefit them may increase the number of personal details that students are willing to share, such as -

- To keep you informed about updates to the school
- To invite you to networking or learning events in future
- To share mentoring/careers initiatives with you
- To ask you to get involved in relevant school activities
- To inform you about connection requests from fellow alumni

In a 2020 ToucanTech survey, 92% of development professionals wanted to contact new alumni by email, but 83% of their school email addresses expired within a year.

Don't lose touch with alumni who would love to hear from your school!





# Success!

## The next steps for your class of 2021

Hopefully, the hard work of signing up a new class to your alumni network is mostly over, and you can focus on creating meaningful, sustainable engagement.

Engaging your recent leavers usually takes a different form to the rest of your alumni community; they are much less likely to be in a position to give back to their school, and will mostly want to use the alumni community to hear updates about school events and exam results.

Here are 3 things you can share with your new alumni in their first summer:

- Send them a postcard from the school, wishing them well
- Share a congratulatory/commiseratory message, based on exam results
- Use university groups on your alumni site to buddy up new university students with other alumni

### **For further resources on engaging your alumni, check out one of our guides:**

[Deepening Alumni Connections: Without Physical Events](#)

[Adapting fundraising & alumni communications during COVID-19: A practical case study](#)

[Five Engagement Examples](#)

[Encouraging Business Networking](#)

[6 reasons your alumni should join your online community](#)

[Engaging recent leavers](#)



# Connect your Class of 2021 long-term using an online community website

A private portal provides a place for alumni of all ages to come together & engage with the school.

Creating an online alumni community gives your alumni the choice to join in and stay in touch with your school. Whether they want to hear the latest school news, or take advantage of job opportunities in their network, having access to a platform where alumni feel encouraged to connect is a lifelong benefit.

## News

Publish articles about the school, or alumni initiatives

## Events

Promote opportunities to connect, online or offline

## Discussion Forum

Encourage conversation and comment

## Picture Galleries

Post images old and new, and create galleries

## Individual Groups

Coordinate subsets of alumni into groups or clubs

## Merchandise

Use the online shop to make sales, or promote donations

## Notifications

Inform community members when activity takes place

## Job Board

List available opportunities at top organisations

## Resources

Share helpful guidance, such as CV templates

## Did you know?

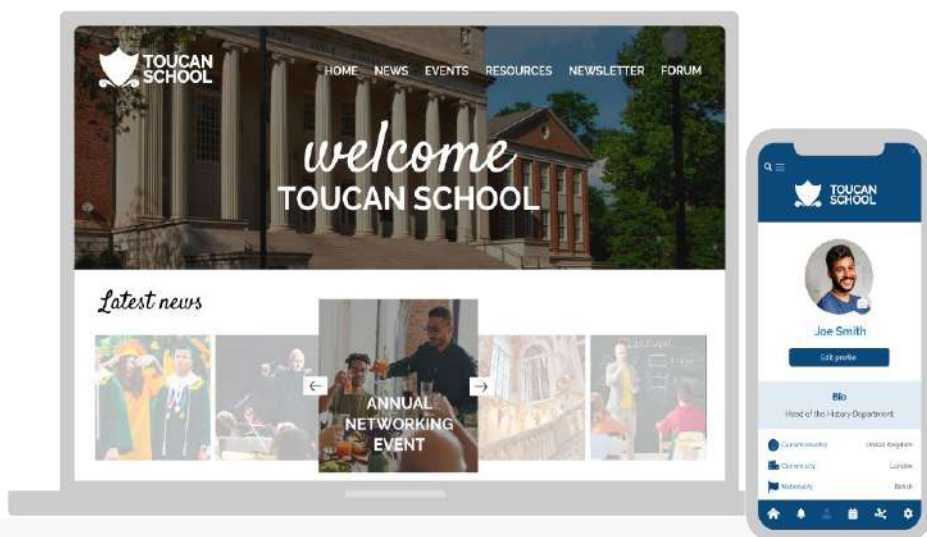
A ToucanTech alumni community is connected to a robust database and easy-to-use CRM system, meaning that all interactions are automatically logged on alumni records. A built in email engine makes contacting alumni simple.



# About ToucanTech



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



## Database

Import, filter, update and merge record, create custom fields, forms and admin permissions



## Community

Connect your members on a branded network with privacy controls and mobile app



## CRM

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



## Groups

Set-up club pages where admins can manage their own members, discussions, events



## Email

Design and schedule newsletters, view stats, remove bounced emails, manage unsubscribes



## Fundraising

Process donations and tax relief, set up funds, reconcile payments, run reports, steward donors



## Resources

Upload photos, documents, magazines - tag, categorise, share and track downloads



## Careers

Run a mentoring system, post jobs, publish careers guides, promote business networking



## News

Publish articles, videos, and other content - track views, tag people, share on social media



## Events

Manage your events (online or in-person), invites, reminders, seating plans and ticketing





“

ToucanTech is a game-changer for schools. We need a sophisticated CRM to track pledges and payments, alongside a communications platform for news, emails, mentoring and events – we’ve definitely made the right choice!”

**Andy Whittall,**  
Tonbridge School



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