

The Pros and Cons of Social versus Business Networking Sites for Alumni Associations

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To what extent should alumni associations provide purely business or purely social networking functions online? The social sites are the ones where alumni meet friends, pursue hobbies, share tastes in music, movies, books and games, and look for non-business connections and support. The business sites are where alumni showcase their professional achievements, interests and successes to effect their next career move, business transaction or other professional deal.

This list offers a quick consideration of some pros and cons regarding each type of site. Keep in mind that many sites aim to offer a combination of social and business networking.

== Social Networking Site ==

PROS

- The concept and tools are familiar; alumni already use these sites and maintain profiles on multiple systems (hence the success of sites like Friendster, Facebook, MySpace, and Classmates).
- Appeals to alumni who may have no interest in business networking.
- Students are creating these social networks themselves and will take them along when they leave campus to enter the job market or graduate school, providing an opportunity for us to graft an alumni component onto these systems.

CONS

- Having a previously established network might make alumni unwilling to join an alumni- branded group.
- Data tends to be unstructured and poorly suited to incorporation in alumni databases.
- Keeping the group active is difficult without motivating factor (social events?). Individual motivation is limited, as there is little to drive interactions, unlike business networking (looking for a job, internship, venture capital, etc.).
- Alumni-exclusive group holds low value (being friends with someone has nothing to do with where they went to school, but when looking for a job your alma mater counts).
- Limits the pool of friends to draw from.

== Business Networking Site ==

PROS

- Provides valuable "service" to alumni (helps provide sales leads, job contacts, funding, referrals).
- Merging of the alumni/non-alumni networks of individuals, creating a greater number of connections between the alumni network and the outside world.
- Appeals to alumni who have no interest in purely social networking.

- Drives structured and relevant information into their alumni profile, more useful to alma mater than knowing their favorite book or movie.

CONS

- No industry standards for reporting or retrieving data from vendor.
- Lack of control over functionality, interface, design, and reliability, due to third party supplier.
- Few purely business networking sites available to partner with (LinkedIn as opposed to Tribe, Facebook, Friendster, etc.).