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## University of Dayton Keeps Alumni Close Using High-Tech, Targeted E-Mail Messages

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## NEWS RELEASE

### UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON KEEPS ALUMNI CLOSE USING HIGH-TECH, TARGETED E-MAIL MESSAGES

DAYTON, Ohio — Most businesses have wide fields from which to draw customers. Investment firms can court anyone with money, and grocery stores market to those who buy food.

A university has an extremely limited pool of customers — alumni. Lose a customer and you wait until the next commencement ceremony to find a replacement.

The University of Dayton has instituted an innovative e-marketing plan — customized e-mail newsletters — that builds on the tremendous amount of specific knowledge gleaned about its customers, the 80,000 alumni it relies on to promote its mission, enhance its programs, attract future students and contribute to its financial success.

And it works, capturing the attention of a significant portion of customers.

“Our alumni do not have to tell us their interests in advance,” explained Tim Bete, e-marketing manager for the advancement division of the University. “We already know them. We know their major, birthday, mailing address, and which clubs and extra-curricular activities they participated in while at UD. We know which events they’ve attended, what they donate to and which ones are married to other graduates, for instance.”

About every other week, more than 9,000 custom, personalized e-mail newsletters are created and sent on their way, using the alumni database to target the interests and particular demographics of each recipient. Distribution takes about 30 minutes.

The results outpace all benchmarks of traditional marketing. Seven issues have been sent since the debut in April 2000. An average of 7,263 alumni have received each newsletter, with a total click-through to targeted messages of 17,792, or nearly 35 percent, and the unsubscribe rate is less than .02 percent per issue. For the most recent e-mail newsletter, sent mid-September, the click-through rate grew to record 42 percent.

Costs are minimal, and gains are substantial. The e-marketing tool was put in place with

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no additional budget or staff. Resource reallocation provided the staff time and money to create an entirely new Web portal for the alumni audience. In return, alumni use e-mail to update their own mailing addresses, providing a savings of about \$18,000 per year to the University.

But it's not just about the money — Alumni are the key audience for any university.

"UD has the vision to be a leader in Catholic higher education," said Fran W. Evans, vice president for University advancement. "It's widely acknowledged that we cannot achieve that goal alone. Alumni are the only lifelong partners the University has. Administrators change, faculty change and students change. Alumni are forever."

Thus the need to keep them close. "Companies like Amazon.com and Microsoft have almost an unlimited supply of potential customers," Bete said. "We get 1,500 new prospective customers a year, period. That's how many new UD graduates there are each year. If we alienate one, we can't bring in a new one for another year. So keeping those relationships is critical."

Bete and Tom Columbus, editor of the UD Quarterly alumni publication, compile and send the newsletter using ActiveAlumni software developed by a company called LiquidMatrix. Each bimonthly issue uses a pool of about 30 news and sports stories about the University and related Web sites of interest. Stories and sites are coded according to audience. The news that UD's president, Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., would be stepping down in 2002 after 23 years in the post was coded for all alumni, for instance, while news of an upcoming football match-up with Yale was sent to athletics donors and graduates who live within driving distance of Yale.

The newsletter itself is compiled of short blurbs about each targeted story with a link to the full release. Recipients click on the link if they're interested in reading more about the subject.

One of the most popular connections recently has been the link to submit a memorial Mass intention. After receiving the Sept. 11 issue, more than 9 percent of recipients clicked through to the Web page about the service to honor a deceased relative or friend. Fifty of them visited the online submission form and another 33 visited the Web page to submit a deceased relative or friend's name for the campus prayer list.

It's an opt-in service, with registration to receive the e-mail newsletter provided on the alumni Web site (<http://alumni.udayton.edu/>). Notices about the site and the newsletter are featured in print publications that go to alumni, and postcard campaigns are used to drive young graduates to the site.

"A lot of schools e-mail their graduates," Bete said. "Some schools even e-mail

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newsletters. But we've not found any other school that compiles a personalized newsletter for every alum."

LiquidMatrix created the ActiveAlumni software that supports the customized alumni newsletters, as well as ActiveAdmissions, ActiveRegistrar and ActiveAthletics for other university functions. It has clients that include Butler University in Indianapolis, the University of Scranton, Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y., and SUNY College at Purchase, but none have yet launched a similar project to customize alumni newsletters, said Kevin Guyton, executive vice president of strategic services for the company.

The idea for a UD e-mail newsletter was endorsed by alumni who were surveyed during the summer in 1999. Forty-two percent of all graduates said they wanted to be contacted via electronic communication, including 15 percent of those who graduated before 1950.

Plans for the alumni Web site are growing. Registered alumni are now receiving e-mail birthday cards on their birthdays, and Bete envisions merging student and alumni data to connect those with similar interests. A biology major from Phoenix, for example, could find a link to a biology graduate living in Phoenix when he or she opens the alumni site, or a theater major who wants to work summer stock could find a link to a business graduate running a theater company.

It's a high-tech effort to enhance the community that is built while students are on campus. "If we don't keep the ties between our graduates and the University strong beginning at graduation, with every day that goes by their affection slides until they lose interest and it's gone. It's tough to get that back.

"They're feeling warm fuzzies because we listened to what they want and we're giving it to them. That's got to help," Bete said.

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