

Arizona State University W.P. Carey School of Business

The W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University is one of the largest business schools in the United States with 190 faculty, 1,500 graduate students and more than 5,600 undergraduates. The school is internationally recognized for its leadership in business education and is highly regarded for its renowned faculty and their research productivity. Alumni of the W. P. Carey School of Business remain engaged with the school long after completing their program of study. Alumni volunteers are active participants in the recruiting process and student mentor program.

THE SITUATION

When the Carey School of Business began its search for a company/software that could provide a robust online alumni community, they had only a text-based alumni directory. Graduate alumni were looking for more. A panel of advisors was assembled to define the requirements of such software. They found that their site and subsequent online community should:

- have a graphical interface (versus text-only)
- be easy to use regardless of an individual's computer/internet expertise
- host job postings with administrator approvals
- allow users to control their privacy and be available to members only
- allow users to self-subscribe
- feature member searches by name, job title, industry and employer
- be the portal to any alumni need

After deciding on the requirements, the alumni liaison turned to the internal IT group. Previously scheduled projects kept them from being able to take on the project immediately so ASU focused on outside vendors. They considered public and private communities, free and paid software. Some free public sites were eliminated because of their inability to represent the alumni in a professional manner as well as the security/data concerns that surface when a site is available to everyone. ASU's graduate alumni are very protective of their privacy and selective with whom they share information. Other companies were crossed off because of their a la carte pricing structures. Still others were overlooked because they were not intuitive and user-friendly. The selection was eventually narrowed down to YourMembership.com and a public career-focused provider. Both companies provided the basics of what the panel deemed important in selecting an alumni community. The critical selection came down to:

1. Who owns the member data?
2. Is there a contract?
3. What level of customer service/training will be provided?

After taking live demos with both providers and reading the privacy statements and FAQs, the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University chose YourMembership.com.

GOALS

The goals for the first year (April 2007 – April 2008) were to have 1,000 registered users and to find a perpetual source of funding for the site. Since alumni receive many services at no cost, and to attract member registration, there was a strong desire to keep the site free to members.

RESULTS

One e-mail advertising campaign and one postcard advertising campaign to the alumni base yielded more than 1,800 registered users (by December 31, 2007 – just eight short months after launch), and by the end of the first year, the number of registered users was nearly 2,200. In regards to funding, the group proposed making the annual Class Gift fundraising campaign dedicated to supporting the alumni community. Several individuals saw the value in this product and collectively donated funds to support the community.