

CASE STUDY

How The George Washington University Uses Brazen's Online Networking Platform to Engage Alumni

Staff at The George Washington University wanted to rally their alumni — but without spending tons of cash or organizing in-person events with low attendance rates. Here's how they used the Brazen online networking platform to engage 250,000+ alumni.

The Community: The George Washington University

Despite its Washington, D.C., location, students at The George Washington University come from all over—from all 50 states, the District, and more than 130 countries. Those students go on to become congressional representatives, forensic scientists, musicians, and CEOs, among many others. But before they answer their calling, they don another special title: alumnus.

And with 250,000+ alums, it's no surprise that The George Washington University is at the forefront of new tools to engage with their audience. The 30 staff members at the Office of Alumni Career Services actively pursue events and resources that will **strengthen the bonds between students, alumni, parents, and the University, creating a community for life**. Of the utmost concern to staff, as well as alumni, are the resources available to help alumni in their careers—from their first job to their dream job, if they're not already one and the same.

The Problem: In-Person Events are Expensive, Time-Consuming and Ineffective

The university has long had its own successful LinkedIn alumni networking group, one of the biggest on LinkedIn, but with recent changes in the economy and the high unemployment rate, staff at the Office of Alumni Career Services realized they needed to identify additional avenues to support the needs of alumni at all career stages.

They set the bar high: **any new ideas needed to be cost-effective, time-effective, and easy to get alumni buy-in**. More than anything, these new tools had to lead to actual changes for alumni, job leads in particular. GW staff also wanted to better understand exactly what alums needed to succeed in their career goals, so having the ability to collect quality data was a high priority.

The Solution: How the Brazen Platform Works for GW

As alumni staff looked for solutions that were time- and cost-effective—goals echoed by many universities—they realized that simply adding more in-person networking events didn't make sense.

Instead, Director of Alumni Career Services Michael Steelman sought out Brazen to give its alumni access to our unique, one-on-one virtual event platform. "The Brazen platform is very sustainable and has the ability to collect important data, all at a relatively minimum cost," Steelman said.

"You don't have to worry about the food and drink costs, which are associated with many in-person networking events," he added. "The success over the years around the GW LinkedIn group clearly shows the importance of networking for our alumni. The Brazen platform allows me to program an event specifically to this group of 30,000+ members around the world."

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Steeleman and his team researched plenty of other options before settling on the Brazen platform. "There were some companies that had video chats, but I imagined that alumni don't want to have to worry about someone looking at them," he said. "We chose the Brazen platform because it offered text-based chats, it's easy to manage, and they were also willing to improve and build the platform with us."

With the promise of making 8-10 meaningful, legit connections in each one-hour event, GW alumni quickly signed up to participate. Steelman subsequently created event after event, allowing alumni to chat with potential employers and other alumni to develop lifelong personal and professional networks.

The Result: More Engaged Alumni and Lots of Event Registrations

Since 2012, Steelman has run more than 30 of these virtual networking events. He and his staff at GW have also expanded their offerings, providing specific networking events for niche alumni audiences, also known as affinity groups, such as GW LGBT, veterans, and Asian Americans, with great success.

In fact, registration numbers for GW events on the Brazen platform often outnumber those of the university's in-person events. And despite its virtual nature, the benefits of using the Brazen platform go far beyond the online world, Steelman said.

“Those participating online become more engaged and subsequently become aware of the various events we organize and then participate in in-person events when possible,” he said. “For example, I had a conversation during an online event with someone living in San Francisco, and I suggested she come to an in-person event held in her area—she came and brought friends.”

From 2012 to 2014, GW’s 30 events resulted in 3,843 registrants, 2,151 attendees, and 9,473 conversations. The Brazen platform has allowed GW to enhance its many alumni benefits by meeting alumni where they already are and providing the foundation for incredible introductions. And as the employment landscape continues to change, these meaningful connections made by alumni will continue to pay dividends.