How To Increase
Alumni Engagement
With New Technology

The Ultimate Alumni Engagement Guide, Featuring Tips from IE University

Introduction

The past few years have brought about incredible digital transformation. Technology has enabled us to work remotely, order groceries online, and attend celebrations virtually. Further, mobile devices have enabled us to connect with peers, check-in to events, and receive updates in real time.

These digital technology trends permeate all industries, including higher education. Alumni engagement is no exception. To stay relevant, the tools universities and colleges use to manage and boost alumni involvement continuously need to evolve alongside technology changes.

The most effective engagement strategies **elevate the alumni experience** in terms of the alumni engagement activities they offer and the technology they use. To be more successful, many higher education establishments are currently re-evaluating their alumni strategy and engagement tools.

This guide includes **5 best practices** to **increase alumni engagement** with new technology. It also provides tips from **IE University**. Based in Madrid, Spain, IE University has among the most advanced digital alumni engagement strategies we've seen.

ie UNIVERSITY
ALUMNI
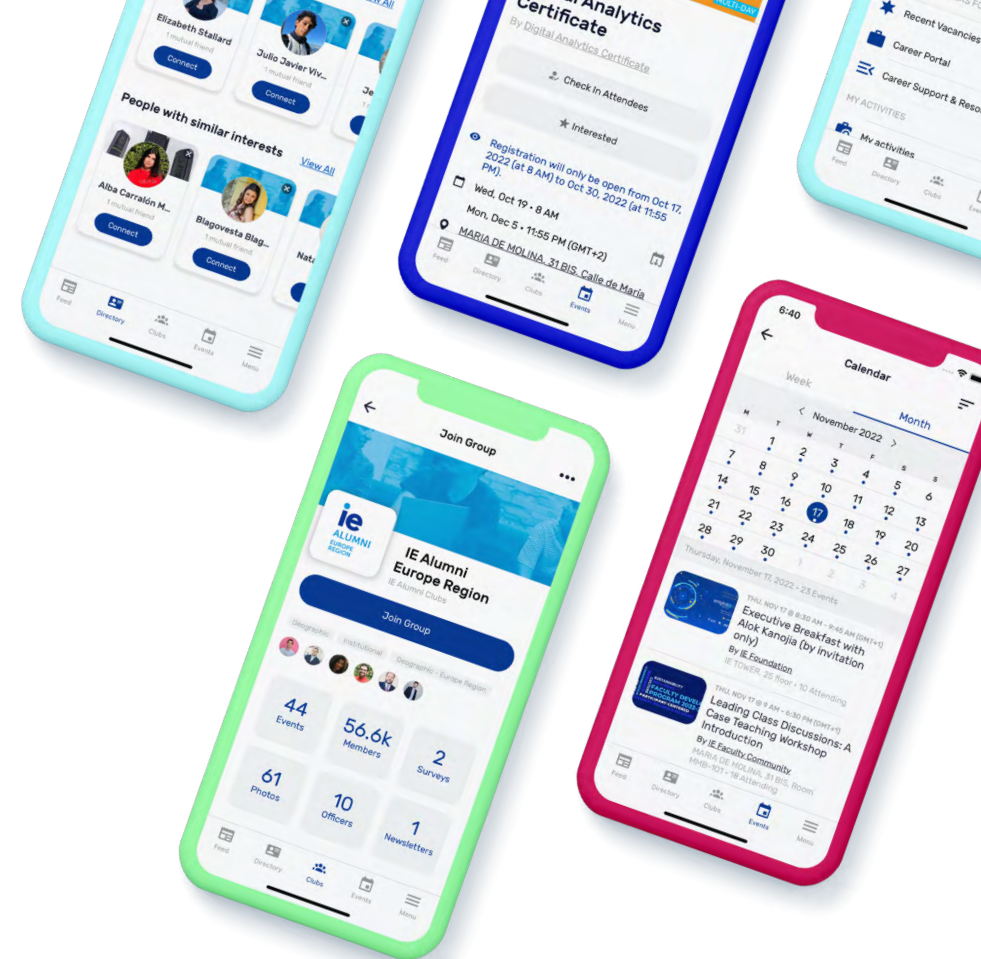
Type Of Institution
Four Year Private University

Customer Since
2013

Alumni Numbers
75,000

Location
Madrid, Spain

5 BEST PRACTICES THAT INCREASE ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT:

1

Having **a one-stop shop** for Student & Alumni Connection

2

Building a **Culture** of Engagement

3

Creating a **Mobile-First** Experience

4

Offering a **Customized and Personalized** Experience

5

Developing a **Data Driven** Strategy

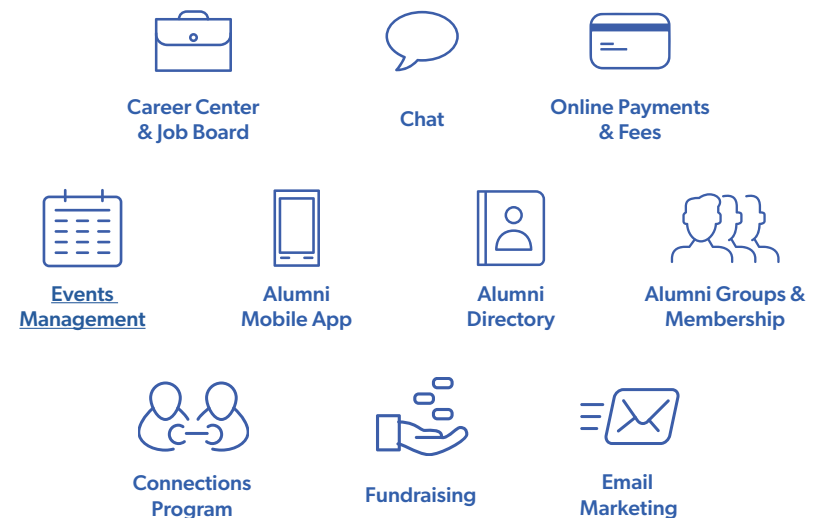# 1. A One-Stop Shop for Student & Alumni Connection

Having a centralized platform to manage engagement is critical for higher education institutions. A digital community creates a single place for users to collaborate and engage with their campus. It also serves as a central resource to track and measure engagement.

Students use the portal to manage their co-curricular life on campus and access student service information. Alumni use the portal to **stay connected** with campus, **network,** and **support their alma mater**. Administrators use it to manage and assess alumni involvement and build alumni outreach strategies.

Engagement strategies are more **informed, purposeful,** and **effective,** when student and alumni engagement lives on one platform. It also means that relationships built on campus continue to live within the system post-graduation. These include connections with peers, student clubs, Greek life organizations, faculty members, athletic coaches, and alumni.

Further, in terms of user experience (UX), a single system makes the transition from student to alumni seamless. Users don't need to download a new app or learn a new password. This contributes to higher retention rates and continuity in engagement with the institution post-graduation.

Like the student tool, the UX of the alumni tool should be simple to use and intuitive. It should also be alumni centric. According to our Campus Partner alumni and advancement teams, **critical features** for an alumni engagement portal include:

Career Center & Job Board

Chat

Online Payments & Fees

Events Management

Alumni Mobile App

Alumni Directory

Alumni Groups & Membership

Connections Program

Fundraising

Email Marketing

Tips from IE University

IE University is among the first higher-ed institutions to use a campus experience platform to manage student and alumni community engagement. Since 2013, IE University has used the "IE Connects" platform to manage the campus experience of its 8,000 students. In October, 2021 IE University created a **dedicated alumni hub** within "IE Connects" to manage the experience of its global community of 75,000 alumni professionals

"IE Connects" bundles a **suite of resources** in a single digital platform that support the alumni community at various life stages. From the portal, alumni can access benefits including: alumni and career development events, alumni clubs, alumni and student directory, and advisory sessions.

For IE University the top 5 features of the Alumni Hub are:

✔ Alumni Directory ✔ Events & Activites ✔ Alumni Groups & Membership

✔ Connections Program ✔ Alumni Mobile App

> "Digital engagement via IE Connects is vital to the long-term relationship with our growing and diverse alumni community. It enables the university to manage student and alumni engagement with **one system** while providing a customized and therefore more relevant experience for alumni."

SARA LINDGREN,
Deputy Head of Alumni Engagement and Programs,
Global Alumni Relations at IE University
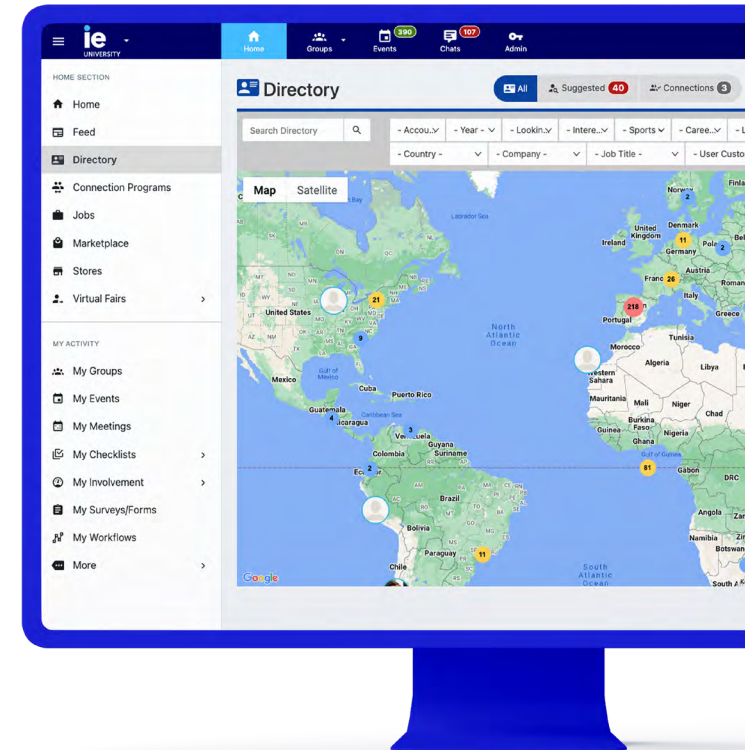
2. A Culture of Alumni Engagement

Ideally, engagement begins as soon as students set foot on campus and **lasts a lifetime.** Having an engagement strategy that drives engagement throughout the entire learner journey benefits everyone. It helps students, alumni, and higher education institutions:

🔗 **Connect**   👥 **Collaborate**   🙌 **Succeed**

Building a culture of engagement efficiencies **starts when students are on campus.** Advancement and alumni teams do this by being active in the campus community year-round in person and online.

Alumni teams can become a trusted campus partner by attending key student events. They should be present and accessible to students. This starts with student orientation through to senior breakfast during finals week.

They should also be a go-to resource for career support. Industry-specific panel discussions with alumni or faculty experts in the field are excellent ways to connect students with leaders in the industry. These events also help them expand their network.

Student-alumni mentoring programs are also powerful, contributing to student retention and success. Further, they demonstrate how active alumni can engage with their alma mater by donating time and talent. There are lots of other alumni engagement ideas to nurture involvement in college alumni.

Fostering a culture of in-person and virtual engagement on campus leads to **higher engagement levels** post-graduation." Further, the quality of alumni engagement is better when institutions have already:

✓ **Invested in the relationship.**

✓ **Built strong communication channels.**

✓ **Robust data to leverage.**

Tips from IE University

The mission of IE Global Alumni Relations is to **accompany alumni for life.** They provide alumni with opportunities for career progression, networking and lifelong learning. With an extremely diverse alumni community, spanning over 160 countries, digital engagement enables IE's alumni team to offer services and resources to alumni worldwide.

When launching the "IE Connects" alumni hub, the IE Global Alumni Relations team took a phased approach. First, they did a "soft" launch, engaging student ambassadors and highly engaged alumni for user feedback. This enabled the team to gain insights and feedback from specific segments of the community, tweak the product, and adapt communications accordingly.

Prior to launching to the entire alumni community, the team **initially launched to current students** about to graduate. As highly active users of the platform, this group provided important insights into the user experience. They also communicated to top-tier club leaders, who served as ambassadors with their own club members to get the alumni community excited about using IE Connects.

> "The alumni community has responded very positively to IE Connects. Our phased launch strategy gave us confidence that the user experience we created would resonate well with alumni. The results have been phenomenal: unique **logins have more than tripled** since the launch"
>
> **SARA LINDGREN,**
> *Deputy Head of Alumni Engagement and Programs,*
> *Global Alumni Relations at IE University*
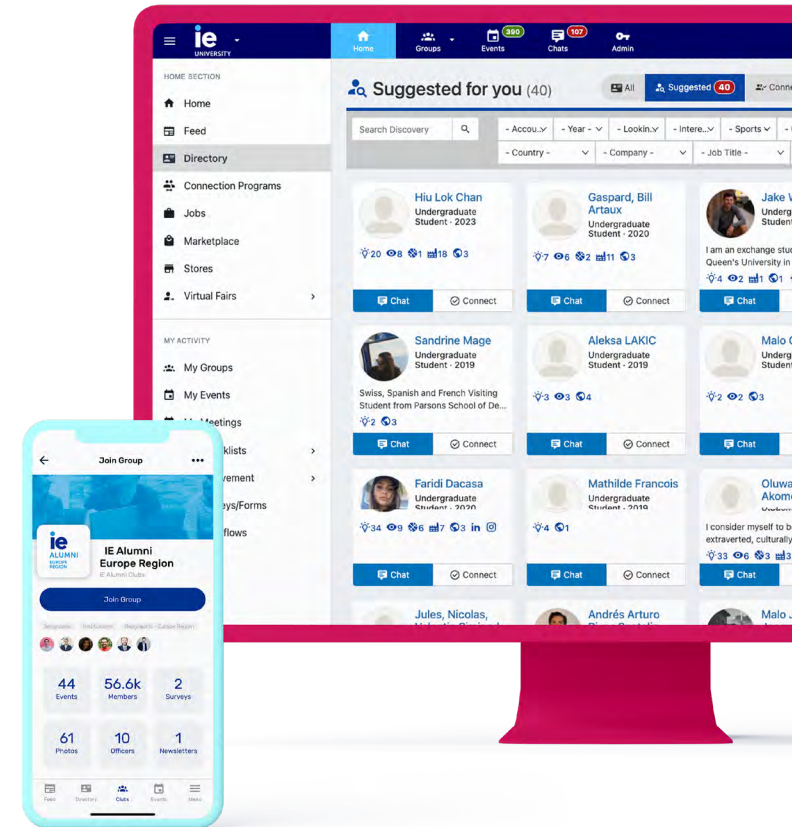
3. A Mobile-First Alumni Experience

Research shows that 95% of adults aged 18-49 and 61% of adults 65 years and older own a smartphone. American adults on average reportedly **check their phone 344 times per day,** which is approximately once every 4 minutes!

Digital natives constitute the largest cohort of students. They want to access everything on-demand from the palm of their hand. Mobile devices, applications and social media are integral to their daily lives. Further, mobile apps increasingly drive how they gather information, learn, and socialize.

This digital-first movement translates into new expectations for alumni. While having a mobile friendly website is great, it may no longer be enough. In this age of on-demand information, having a mobile presence helps create a **positive alumni experience.**

Further, to be successful, the app needs to be easy to use, and highly customizable. It is important to personalize the look and feel of your mobile app to meet the needs of your community. Having an app that is branded for your school, including your school's colors and logo, helps with brand recognition. It also helps **develop a sense of belonging.**

When launching the app, ensure the call to action (downloading the app) is clear. Some tools make this easy, using QR codes and other tools. A good practice is to take advantage of alumni events with a high-footfall to broaden the reach. This provides access to a wide user base and makes the app part of the experience

Sending targeted communications highlighting the benefits of the app to those that haven't yet downloaded it is also effective. Incentives through gamification are also a great way to **increase app adoption.** For example, users could receive a badge for downloading the app or being highly-active.
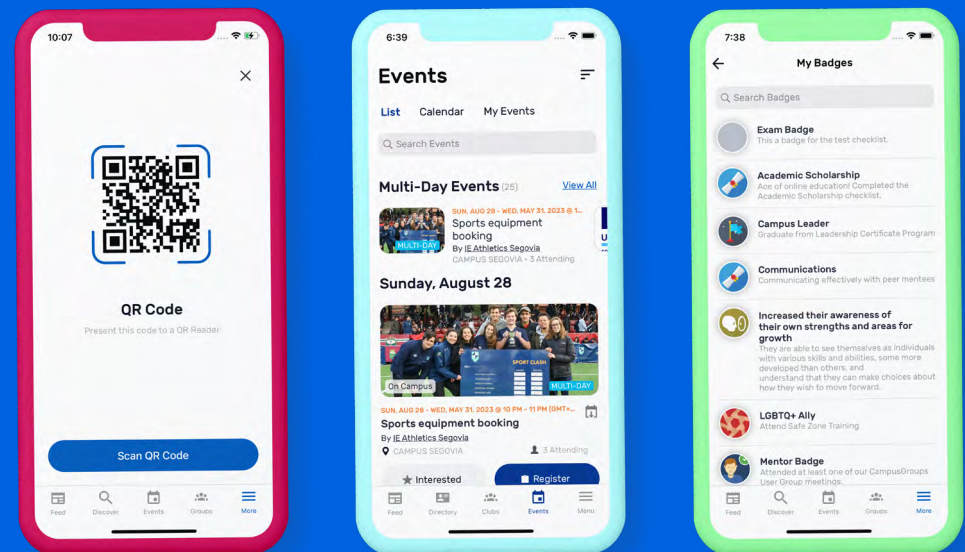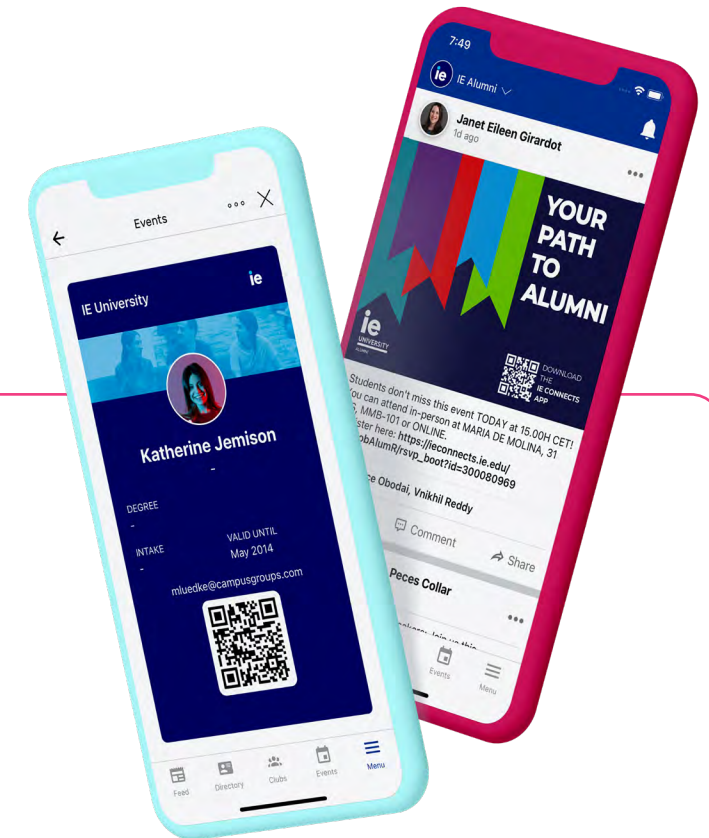
Tips from IE University

To strengthen connections with its global alumni community, in September 2022, IE launched their new personalized alumni mobile app experience. To promote the new app, the alumni team created a short video demonstrating how the app **elevates the way alumni connect and engage.**

To encourage users to download and use the app, the Alumni Team at IE launched a dynamic, multichannel alumni campaign. The campaign leveraged direct email and social media. It also elicited help from alumni club leaders and regional resources to further amplify the communication.

The direct email campaign was phased, segmenting each communication into specific profiles. This enabled the alumni team to analyze in real time what was and wasn't working and adjust accordingly prior to communicating to the following segment.

> "Unlike students who use the system as part of their daily lives at IE University, alumni are accessing our services whilst juggling their day-to-day priorities in life. The IE Connects app has to have a **"Wow" factor in the alumni experience** it provides."
>
> **SARA LINDGREN,**
> *Deputy Head of Alumni Engagement and Programs,*
> *Global Alumni Relations at IE University*

"The key advantages of the portal are **geolocation** and having their **alma mater at their fingertips"** according to alumni. IE Connects enables alumni to connect with other alumni and find activities and meaningful experiences near them based on location.

The results are clear. Just one month after the mobile campaign, there were **4,000 app downloads**.

Alumni are accessing IE Connects more frequently, with a **71% increase in monthly unique logins.**

4. A Customized & Personalized Alumni Experience

In the modern technology landscape, **customization and personalization** are core to engagement. Customizing the menu and features to the specific requirements of your institution helps create a **better user experience.** For a seamless experience, we recommend that the mobile app menu is aligns with that of the web platform.

Today, in a world where consumers expect Amazon-level personalization, simply connecting with your alumni network is not enough. You need to connect with a purpose.

Enabling users to display the content they want to engage with is a great way to do this. Push notifications or in-app banners for upcoming events a user has signed-up to, keep users engaged through **targeted messaging.**

The more successful alumni engagement platforms and mobile apps include the following customizable features:

✔ **Alumni centric UX**

✔ **Alumni home page**

✔ **Custom onboarding for alumni**

✔ **Customizable directory**

✔ **Virtual and Hybrid event formats**

✔ **Mobile check-in to events using QR codes**

✔ **Gamification**
(i.e. custom engagement scoring or badges)

✔ **Relevant content based on user preferences**
 (i.e. events based on location and stated interests)

✔ **Targeted communication and tags**

✔ **Group structure that allows for public and private content**

Tips from IE University

As a dedicated alumni engagement hub within a larger platform, "IE Connects" enables the university to have everything on one system but provide custom experiences for specific populations of users. Different members of the global alumni community receive **specific content** based on **user profile,** location, industry, and other factors.

For example, IE has a membership-based alumni community. "Alumni Plus" is their paid-dues membership model, offering **exclusive benefits**, activities, and on-demand content to its members. Through "IE Connects", IE Alumni Plus members can access their premium career development and lifelong learning resources that are not publicly available to non-members.

> "Designing a user flow that meets the needs of our alumni is critical. Alumni need to easily find those resources and activities that they are most interested in. We need to create an experience that encourages them to **access the platform again and again.**
>
> The platform delivers **relevant content** based on the alumni´s preference (events by geography, by clubs membership and/or interest). Further, we actively develop user interest tags that help us better target our communications according to their interests.
>
> Having a user-friendly onboarding feature was instrumental in creating a **customized alumni experience**. It also serves as a mechanism to gain important insights into alumni needs."
>
> **SARA LINDGREN,**
> *Deputy Head of Alumni Engagement and Programs,*
> *Global Alumni Relations at IE University*

5. A Data Driven Alumni Strategy

Alumni strategies backed by engagement data are most effective. This is because they can quickly be adapted based on current engagement trends and preferences.

Having insight into **student involvement profiles** (club memberships and interests) and **engagement preferences** (mobile and/or email) is critical to keeping them engaged post-graduation. It also enables the identification of influencers that can become stewards of alumni engagement and run campaigns.

This is especially true for young alumni. The profiles of **young alumni** are changing and more diverse than ever before. They stand out because their student experience was mostly virtual, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Unlike other alumni, these students did not have the traditional college experience. The way that they engaged with their campus was vastly different than previous generations. Therefore, how they engage as alumni will also be different and increasingly dependent on digital technology.If you don't have a means of measuring engagement, know that it can start small. Identifying 5-10 meaningful engagement

metrics for your institution is a great place to start. Things like email open rates, event participation, volunteerism or mentorship can be great indicators.

Once **key indicators are defined and measured,** they can be used as a benchmark for future campaigns. Over time they will uncover trends and specific activities with the most success. This can inform the overall engagement strategy and define where to **focus resources.**
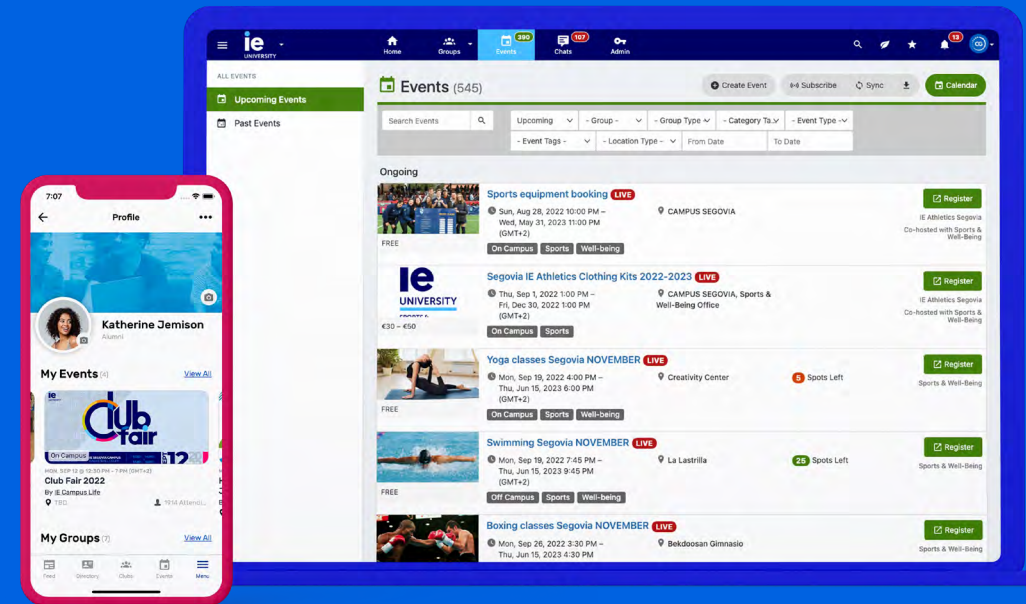
Tips from IE University

IE University's alumni hub sits within the same instance of the engagement platform as the student population. Further, the portal is also integrated with the university's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

> "I highly recommend the investment in real-time **integration with your CRM**. In our case, this enables Single Sign-On with our University's credentials for students and alumni. It also improves data quality with timely and seamless alumni profile updates''.

To further take advantage of IE Connects' analytics and reporting features, the Global Alumni Relations team is increasingly using the tool to gather engagement metrics.

IE's alumni team **measure and assess** the following alumni engagement metrics within the portal: event data (check-in, registration) club membership, paid-dues membership, purchases, targeted communications open rates, mentorship connections, and more.

> "The platform's **analytics capabilities** give us visibility on engagement levels. We can then act on these opportunities by reaching out to alumni who have expressed interest in collaborating with us."
>
> "We aim to **centralize reporting** within "IE Connects" as much as possible for key **engagement metrics**".

SARA LINDGREN,
Deputy Head of Alumni Engagement and Programs,
Global Alumni Relations at IE University

Creating a more positive alumni experience:

Many higher education establishments are reportedly looking to elevate the alumni experience using new technology. According to our Campus Partners, such as IE University, technology helps colleges and universities build a more robust and agile engagement strategy. It also helps **increase alumni engagement.**

Technology provides administrators with more visibility into current engagement metrics and trends. It also provides them with better engagement tools, enabling them to adapt their strategy based on data analytics.

New technology provides a more engaging alumni experience. The resources and networking opportunities alumni teams provide, contribute to the professional development, life satisfaction and success of alumni. This encourages alumni to stay connected with and **give back to the campus community.**

From our experience working with 200+ Campus Partners, leveraging student and alumni data contributes to increased engagement, retention and fundraising. Further, investing in an all-in-one alumni management system leads to cost savings, as legacy systems can sunset.

Are you looking to create a more successful alumni program?

If so, we would love to help you develop your alumni engagement strategy.

Click here to speak to us
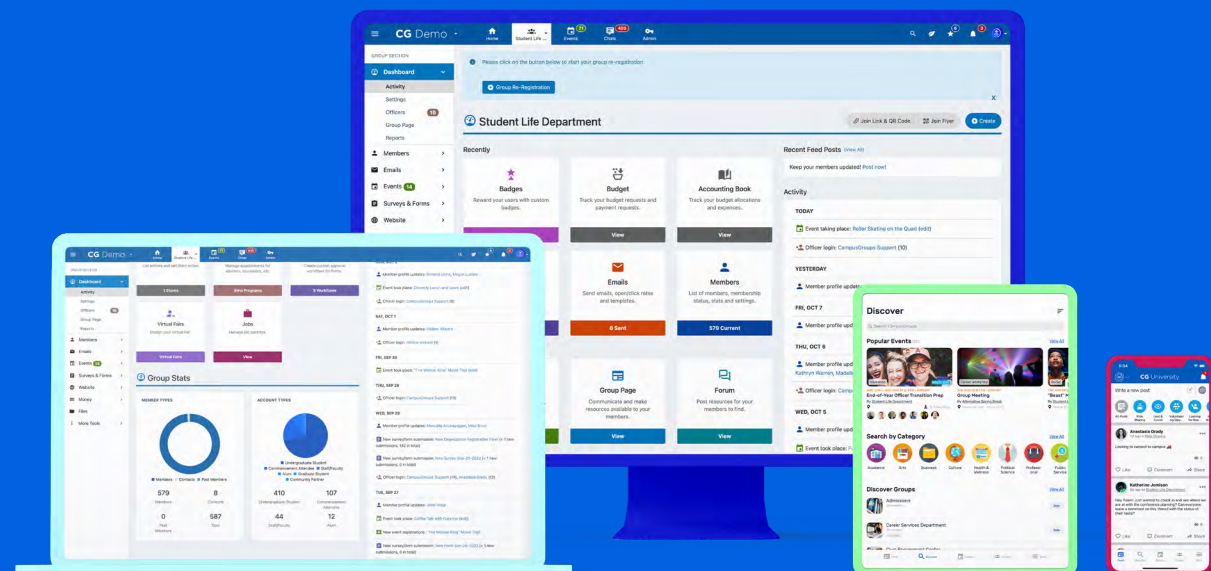
READY Education

Ready Education is the largest student engagement platform provider worldwide, helping students succeed all over the world. Meet and exceed your students' expectations by embracing your digital campus!

Want to learn more about us?
readyeducation.com

Reach out via **1 (877) 588-7508**
or email **info@readyeducation.com**