

Reconnecting St Albans School

Forward-thinking approach to friendraising and fundraising.



CASE STUDY

Donor Strategy helps St Albans School reconnect with more than 75% of former pupils, and rising

With a heritage stretching back more than a millennium, St Albans School in Hertfordshire also has a forward-thinking approach to friendraising and fundraising.

Client >

St Albans School

Sector >

Education

Project >

Reconnecting former pupils through an exclusive alumni development network

"The Advanced NFP team gave me every support during the implementation"

Kate Le Sueur

Three years ago, newly appointed Development Manager Kate Le Sueur recommended the purchase of Donor Strategy.

Since then, the system has been helping the School to build a solid foundation of good relationships with former pupils in preparation for embarking on its first active fundraising in a quarter of a century.

With the groundwork completed, Donor Strategy is now helping the School to renew its centuries-old tradition of benefaction among the Old Albanian community.

St Albans School is one of the oldest educational foundations in Europe. Today, it is an independent academic day school where around 770 pupils receive a first-rate education from over 70 staff, in an environment rich in opportunities.

Headmaster Andrew Grant MA is Chairman of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC).

Business challenge

The School appointed its first professional Development Manager in 2007. Kate Le Sueur took on the task of fostering strong relationships with over 7,000 alumni, almost half of whom had lost contact with the School.

Kate recalls, "Rather than pressurising me to fundraise from day one, governors recognised that before making calls on former pupils' generosity, we had to work hard on our friendraising. We needed to build close relationships, foster a sense of being part of an exclusive network, and encourage their active participation in the life of the School."

Solution deployed

Kate was given free rein to choose her own alumni development system: "I had the opportunity to explore the market and find a solution that was just right for our needs. Some of the offerings available were over the top in both price and functionality. After much

careful research, we chose Donor Strategy from Advanced NFP as an excellent mid-range system geared to the requirements of schools like ours, and within our budget."

Then began the job of sifting through records going back to the 1940s, most held on paper in the archive on school rolls, some on spreadsheets and some on a 'homemade' MS-DOS system. Kate comments, "The Advanced NFP team gave me every support during the implementation, but there's something to be said for ploughing through the records yourself and understanding your data in depth."

Through the Donor Strategy Web Connect module, a webpage on the main School website acts as a portal to information for Old Albanians. This 'microsite' has a real buzz about it: alumni can search for and connect with old classmates across the world; join clubs and societies; subscribe to a news bulletin; buy merchandise; and view photographs going back to the 1920s. Access to the site is password-protected and members can choose just how much personal information to include. It links to the Donor Strategy database, so that transactions carried out on the website are reflected in the database.

Being able to go online and browse information offers an easy way to discover the benefits of re-engaging with their old school. "Rather than having to attend a reunion event out of the blue, our former pupils can gently build up their interest and decide if they want to become more involved," comments Kate. "Incidentally, it's been wonderful to provide the generations who left the School in the 50s and 60s, before the age of the home computer, with a way of finding one another again."

Flexibility was an important buying criterion and Kate has found it easy to mould the system to the requirements of the Development Office. She regularly reviews and adapts her usage of the system.

Advanced NFP hosts the database remotely and this has proved 'a life-saver' at times. Kate can be confident that, if a problem occurs,

Flexible usage



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the previous day's data will be there. Kate and her assistant are on the system all day long: "Whenever we've needed help or technical advice, the Advanced NFP support team has been extremely helpful."

Benefits achieved

Kate highlights the functions of Donor Strategy which have been particularly instrumental in her fundraising strategy:

"Our 'Waifs and Strays' area on the microsite helps us to track down those with whom we've lost touch. We may receive a tip-off from a fellow Old Albanian, or often they themselves initiate the contact, having googled their name. We have over 7,000 alumni records on our database, and so far we have contact details for over 5,500 of these Donor Strategy allows us to store, track and edit every morsel of information we have, so we're always on top of things."

The system dramatically improves efficiency, too. The small development team is able to promote regular social events to encourage as many former pupils as possible back through the doors. Kate explains, "We are constantly juggling our event ambitions against the limit of the number of manhours available to organise them. The Donor Strategy Events module has completely transformed the way we work, and means we can run a large number of smaller, targeted events with the very minimum of fuss and administration."

Kate finds that the most useful function here is the link between Web Connect and the Events module allowing online ticket purchase: "It's all become so easy. We now send almost all invitations and newsletters via email, with a 'click here to buy a ticket online' button. We also post forthcoming events on the website. Alumni book their tickets from our website within a few clicks,

and we simply have to click 'confirm' to add them to the event on the database.

No fuss, no reply slips in unfathomable handwriting, no cheques. Over 35% of alumni have registered with the site, and for our last event 63% of tickets were purchased online." As the bookings come in, at the touch of a button, the Development Office can run off up-to-date reports of numbers and dietary requirements for the caterers, 'who's who' lists for senior management, table plans, name badges, guest lists, unpaid tickets, and so on.

Kate stresses, "It's no exaggeration to say that without Donor Strategy we would have to limit significantly - possibly halve - the number and scope of events we run, because of the administration time it saves us."

The School has launched the St Albans School Foundation as its fundraising body. Here again, the ability of Donor Strategy to capture information about alumni and build up a rounded picture has been of enormous value.

Kate classifies alumni according to where they sit on the spectrum of engagement: identified, interested or involved. She can also draw on information held on the system such as age group and interests: "Donor Strategy has been brilliant in helping us to target our communications very closely, using a variety of approaches, depending on the warmth of the relationship. The response we're receiving to our first targeted fundraising mailing shows that being able to tailor our messages is definitely the right way to go."

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