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**ALUMNI STORY FORMATS
TO INSPIRE YOUR
PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS**

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ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO MARKET YOUR SCHOOL OR PROGRAM TO PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS IS SHOWCASING ALUMNI PROFILES.

There really are few approaches that are more effective. If you're wanting to give a glimpse of how your school can prepare someone for success, what better way than highlighting someone who went through the program and is now applying the skills they learned in a professional setting?

Here's the thing, though.

Oftentimes, alumni profiles can follow a similar format, particularly for graduate programs. Mrs. Alumna felt like she didn't have the skills she needed to propel herself forward in her chosen field, or Mr. Alumnus was tired of the field he was in and decided to make a career pivot. To make the change they felt they needed, they went through your program, and now they're making a

difference in the world using the lessons they learned.

It's an inspiring story, and it's effective.

But it can get repetitive.

To help differentiate your alumni profiles and keep prospective students engaged and inspired, it's important to vary the format of the story you're telling. Mix it up a bit. You still want to explain the role your program played in influencing their success and demonstrate how they're using what they learned, but you can do that in an array of different formats.

Here are five unique formats to try — plus examples of each.

SIDE-BY-SIDE SPOTLIGHT

This is a fun way to highlight multiple alumni at one time. Take two alumni who have similar jobs and ask them the same set of questions. Then present their answers side by side. The formatting is flexible, but short questions that can lead to concise answers are best to make this content easily skimmable (And a design tip: having the answers be roughly the same length is more visually appealing). If you use this in a print product, you can also tease to an extended digital version with more in-depth answers.

This format is also a great tool if you're trying to demonstrate your program's strength in preparing students to go into a certain profession. Imagine you run an information technology (IT) program. You could say your program prepares students to enter c-suite roles as chief technology officers, or you could use this format to highlight two alumni who are CTOs who can talk about their responsibilities and how your program prepared them for where they are today.

Or click the button below to take a look at an example where two presidential speechwriters talk about the realities of their job, the thing most people don't know about speechwriters, and more.

▶ **EXAMPLE: THE MEN BEHIND THE WORDS**

INDUSTRY OR JOB FEATURE

Like the side-by-side spotlight, this is a nice way to feature multiple alumni in one story. The first step is to identify the fields your prospective students want to work in. Depending on your school or program, that may be specific industries, or it may be specific roles within one industry.

Once you have that list, identify alumni who work in each role or industry. Talk with them about what a normal day looks like, what the most important skills are to succeed in that position, and what opportunities may exist for recent graduates. To make your school stand out, use this format to then demonstrate how your program helps prepare students with the skills needed to stand out.

This is a format that also lends itself to easily repurposable content. You can use alumni quotes about the industry in this story and then create individual alumni features that you link to from this story.

In this example, I helped a graduate-level robotics program feature different industries where roboticists can thrive and talked with alumni who work in each field. We ran nine features, and the story format was the same for each individual industry.

▶ **EXAMPLE: ROBOTICS CAREERS IN TRANSPORTATION**

PHOTO ESSAY

It's one thing to tell prospective students about what a career in their chosen industry would look like. It's a whole different thing to show them. That's what this format can do. By finding an alum who lets you follow them and showcase what a day in their life looks like, you are able to clearly differentiate between "telling" and "showing".

The best stories will highlight someone who works in a job of particular interest to your prospective students. If you have prospects who want to become sports journalists, following an alum who is a sports reporter or broadcaster can be highly effective.

Now, there are obvious caveats to this format. This story only works for certain industries and certain positions. Capturing photos of someone who sits behind their computer all day may not be the best way to entice a prospective student. You also need to have access to a good photographer who understands the point of the story.

This type of story works great in print as well as online. The digital opportunities for how to display this format are vast, from being a standalone story on your website to being part of unique social media campaigns.

➤ **EXAMPLE: A DAY IN THE LIFE - LIVE FROM ESPN**

CITY SPOTLIGHT

This format is similar to the industry feature, but this format allows you to dig into a specific city where your prospects want to live.

This type of story is particularly valuable if the industry your prospects want to work in primarily operates out of particular locations. If you're a theater school, you can profile alumni in Los Angeles. If you are training biotechnologists, focusing on alumni in Boston or the Bay Area can be of immense interest.

To increase the value to your prospects, don't just focus on the alumni, but highlight the city experience as well. What's it like to live there? What do people who live there like to do? The goal is to help students envision what their lives and experiences could look like after graduation. Let your alumni help tell that story.

While focusing on popular cities is useful, it can also be helpful to highlight "less popular" cities where alumni work. After all, prospects may think they know where they want to work, but that may be because they don't know about other opportunities. If you show them the possibilities, you might open their eyes to a new job — and a new location — they knew nothing about.

➤ **EXAMPLE: WHERE TO WORK IN BIOTECHNOLOGY**

ORAL HISTORY

This format may be the most time consuming and arguably the most challenging, but when done right, it can offer a substantial return on investment in terms of potential content.

Think about an important event or organization within your school. Maybe it's a student club, maybe it's an annual festival, maybe it's a campus-wide competition. The key is it has to have value to your students — and prospective students need to be able to understand that value.

Once you've chosen a topic, find out its origin story. It will take some research and interviewing, but learn out how it launched, why it got started, and what its legacy is (Bonus tip: make sure to record any of your interviews).

Once the reporting is done, try to piece together a narrative about the topic (I did say this would be challenging).

In this example, I talked to alumni who — 20 years earlier — launched an on-campus news network that grew into an award-

winning club that served as the training ground for dozens of local and national broadcasters.

What I love about this is not only can you tell really fun, impactful stories, but when interviewing alumni about the history, you can also ask them about their work and their school experience, and you can end up doing a series of more traditional alumni profiles on them at a later date.

One interview — multiple stories. I call that a win-win.



EXAMPLE: A LABOR OF LOVE

NEED HELP WITH YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY? LET'S TALK.

As a writer and content strategist, I work with top-ranked universities, C-suite executives, nonprofits, and membership associations to share their stories as articles, whitepapers, e-books, and blog posts that inspire action.

I can help develop a content strategy that allows you to get more value out of your existing assets and create new content that helps your school and its unique programs stand out to prospective students.



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“Marc used his writing and storytelling abilities to illustrate all that our Master of Science in Robotics program has to offer with stories about our students, our faculty and our alumni. We’ve heard from multiple students that the reason they applied to our program was that they had read one of Marc’s stories.”

TODD MURPHEY

DIRECTOR / MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ROBOTICS
McCORMICK SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

“Marc is an incredibly creative and industrious communications specialist. I am in awe of Marc’s myriad talents. He is a gifted writer and a smart editor, who is as proficient at crafting compelling copy as he is at refining other writer’s muddled prose. Marc is a consummate professional and team player.”

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