

Transforming Alumni Engagement and Advancement at St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute

Overview

St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute, the largest private high school in Western New York, has a rich legacy of preparing students for college success. With a robust alumni base of over 11,000 constituents, St. Joe's has employed a growing and evolving advancement program for over 40 years. However, as alumni demographics evolved, traditional communication methods like direct mail and email became less effective in engaging younger graduates. To address this challenge, St. Joe's implemented Mongoose, a conversational engagement platform, to modernize its outreach and achieve remarkable results in alumni engagement and fundraising.

Challenge

St. Joe's faced the challenge of engaging its growing base of younger alumni. Traditional communication methods, such as direct mail and emails, were becoming less effective, often ignored, or relegated to spam folders. The institution needed a way to connect meaningfully with these graduates to enhance participation in events and increase contributions to its annual fund. In 2023, they sought a solution that would break through the noise and allow for personalized, immediate communication with alumni.

Solution

Mongoose was chosen as the conversational engagement platform to address these communication challenges. By using Mongoose's text messaging capabilities, St. Joe's was able to engage alumni in a personal, direct manner that was both scalable and effective.

Sarah Stoklosa, Director of Annual Giving and Stewardship, noted the immediate impact of the platform:

"Texting is very instant and easy. People can reply right away, ask for links, and complete donations through their mobile wallet or sign up for an event in minutes. It's allowed us to break through the noise and reach our alumni where they are most likely to respond."

Implementation & Impact

St. Joe's began using Mongoose in early 2023, just before its annual Day of Giving. Despite limited time to strategize, the integration of Mongoose transformed St. Joe's fundraising efforts and alumni engagement. Through personalized and timely text messages, they were able to drive event attendance and donations significantly.

Key Outcomes

Increased Event Attendance

By using Mongoose to send personalized messages about events, St. Joe's saw a 50% increase in event attendance. Messages were sent before alumni events, such as:

"<FIRST NAME>, Dan Warner '06 at SJCI Alumni. President Fulco and I will be traveling to Los Angeles for a regional alumni reception at Perch (448 S Hill St.) on Thursday, June 6, at 6:00 pm. Let me know if you would like to attend."

Day of Giving Success

In 2024, St. Joe's had 1,892 donors and raised \$485,133 compared to 2023, when it had 1,083 donors and raised \$361,588. Personalized, real-time messages, such as updates on class competitions and exclusive giveaways, played a critical role in driving donations. Messages were sent in real-time to encourage participation, such as:

"Hey Class of 2000, you're third on the donor leaderboard—catch up to 1994, they're only 10 ahead of you!"

Key Outcomes cont.

Personalized Engagement

Mongoose allowed the team to send messages from the Vice President of Institutional Advancement, creating a personal touch that resonated deeply with alumni and led to greater engagement. Sarah noted,

“We get all kinds of responses, from questions about summer camp to bookstore inquiries, which shows the trust and connection we’ve built.”

The Mongoose Difference

Authentic, Empathetic Conversations

Mongoose goes beyond traditional one-way broadcasts by enabling authentic, empathetic, two-way conversations with alumni. The platform's focus on dialogue allows St. Joe's to connect with its audience in a more personal and impactful way. Mongoose's best practice templates and intelligent AI-enabled messaging help the advancement team craft thoughtful and engaging messages that invite genuine interaction. This approach not only increases response rates but also makes recipients feel valued and understood. Sarah explained,

“Our alumni are having direct, meaningful conversations with us, not just receiving another automated message. This capability has transformed our engagement, making it feel much more human and connected.”

Personalized Messaging

Mongoose's ability to personalize messages using merge fields for names and class years helped St. Joe's deliver tailored content that felt direct and relevant to each recipient.

Strategic Support

The Mongoose team provided strategic guidance, such as optimizing message timing to maximize response rates, which was particularly helpful during high-stakes campaigns like the Day of Giving.

Ease of Use

The platform's user-friendly interface allowed the small advancement team to efficiently manage campaigns, despite limited resources. “It's not complicated; it's very user-friendly, and our support reps are always available,” Sarah said.

Future Plans

Looking ahead, St. Joe's plans to deepen its integration of Mongoose with its CRM, Blackbaud, to automate personalized stewardship messages, such as thank-you texts after donations and birthday messages. The school is also exploring the potential of using Mongoose for its upcoming Athletic Week of Giving to further leverage the power of personalized, real-time engagement.

Conclusion

Mongoose has become an indispensable tool for St. Joe's, transforming its alumni engagement and fundraising strategies. By meeting alumni where they are—on their mobile devices—the school has significantly boosted participation and donations, setting a new standard for how they communicate and connect with its community. Sarah added,

“We love Mongoose. It's made a world of difference in our communication plans and our ability to reach alumni and younger alums. It's a tool I'd recommend to anyone looking to truly engage their audience.”

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