

Alumni can be a great market for local businesses

Summer's here and it's time to gear up for high school and college reunions.

Reunions are an opportunity to take a walk down memory lane, reminisce about the glory days of our youth and see how all those people we feared and admired turned out.

Did the quarterback gain 50 pounds and lose his hair or is he still the dream we remember? Is the homecoming queen still the most beautiful girl we've ever seen? Is the class clown still as funny as he was in school?

Aside from providing an in-person "This-is-my-life" reality show, reunions are a great opportunity for businesses to attract new clientele, recruit new employees and they provide a chance to interest former classmates in business and philanthropic opportunities that could positively impact the local community.

Alumni returning to their home towns are a great market if you know

how to reach them.

There are several ways to reach alumni, including advertising at



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reunion events, on reunion Web sites and through newsletters and programs geared toward alumni of a particular area. There are many high schools that host reunions in the Mid-Columbia and in recent years, Kennewick High has hosted an annual all-class reunion in addition to traditional individual class reunions. Each year classes are planning 10- 15- and 20-year reunions and the organizers are sending out information and setting up opportunities for alumni to get together.

Contact information for many of these organizers can be found at www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/reunions/story/8953344p-8869141c.html.

One thing businesses can do is offer free or discounted goods and services to reunion participants.

Businesses can contact the organizers and provide them with fliers, brochures or coupons that can be sent to alumni with informational materials or placed at registration tables.

Another avenue to try is sponsoring class Web sites online.

Class Web sites are an easy way for reunion organizers to stay in touch with classmates and keep them informed of plans as they develop.

As alumni visit the sites to learn about their upcoming reunion, they will see your advertisement.

If you also include a discount for alumni, they may be encouraged to

check out your business.

Alumni programs can also reach this market.

They often develop newsletters, Web sites and other methods for communicating with alumni of a particular community.

The programs generally focus on all alumni-not just a particular class-and, therefore, can have a broader reach than individual reunions.

Owners can send information about their businesses to alumni program coordinators in hopes of having an article published in the program's newsletter or posted on its Web site.

These programs are usually operated as nonprofit organizations and may also be looking for sponsors. Sponsorship generally trades some type of advertising in exchange for financing the programs activities.

Advertising through reunion activities, Web sites or with an alumni program are all possible

ways to help your business reach a new market, grow its customer base and find new employees.

Locally, the Tri-City Development Council, Tri-City Regional Chamber of Commerce, Tri-City Visitor and Convention Bureau, and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory have partnered to develop the Tri-City Alumni Program.

The program is aimed at informing alumni about growth and development opportunities in the Tri-City area.

The group sends a quarterly newsletter and maintains a Web site to keep Tri-City alumni informed about the region.

To learn more about the Tri-City Alumni program go to www.pnnl.gov/edo/business/alumni.

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