Applying an Alumni Feedback System to Adult Education and the School Management Value Chain

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ABSTRACT

Social changes have rapidly amplified information and knowledge, and popular culture has become increasingly diversified, highlighting the importance of adult education with educational and social functions. Among them, the higher is the convergence of social intermediary hub for personal study course. In a knowledge society, it is the mission of a school to provide alumni with lifelong learning opportunities and to meet their education and learning requirements.

This study investigated how to maintain and manage the relationship between a school and its alumni by using an alumni database. Integrating databases, using analyses, and proactively recommending education courses provides lifelong learning and improves the brand image of a school.

Keywords: Adult education, alumni relationship management, alumni database, lifelong learning

INTRODUCTION

Once a person enters an education system, it is a continuous and uninterrupted process until they complete their education. This linear education system makes it difficult for a person to reenter the education system after an interruption. Particularly after entering the workplace, if education does not meet workplace requirements, this leads to frustration. As science and technology continue to progress, social changes rapidly amplify information and knowledge, and popular culture has become increasingly diverse, highlighting the importance of adult education with educational and social functions. Globally, countries are committed to contributing to comprehensive adult education hardware and software, indicating that creating a lifelong learning society is an international movement dedicated to cultivating personal knowledge, skills, abilities, and learning (Xiao, 2008).

Higher education is typically an intermediate personal school career and social convergence hub. Most students typically enter the workplace after graduation, and when they exit the educational system, their relationships with their alma mater ends. However, modern society emphasizes lifelong and continuous learning and education to upgrade skills, expand capacity, and respond to a rapidly changing society. These factors are key to ensuring personal competitiveness in the workplace. Therefore, in addition to focusing on the quality of students in a school, a school should emphasize the learning development of students after graduation, offer and promote returning alumni education and continuing education, and improve alumni abilities in the workplace to facilitate promotion. Alumni performance, support, and recognizing the brand and business of an alma mater are influential. Therefore, maintaining and managing alumni relations is always taken seriously by renowned domestic and foreign universities. By contrast, domestic private schools lack the brand power and long-standing school history of elite brands. Studies have not emphasized the field of alumni and neglect management, making alumni recognition and loyalty difficult to aggregate and alumni difficult to manage. Recently, more universities have adopted open-door
policies and schools have begun competing with each other. The low birth rate problem has also started to affect higher education. These factors make operating private technical and vocational schools challenging. The most critical issues include how to adjust and reform a school's fundamentals, and to avoid being eliminated by social change by using an alumni service mechanism, enhancing the adult education of school graduates, and strengthening the link between graduates and their alma mater. This study used an alumni database system to improve the operation and management of alumni to promote adult education to maintain alumni learning abilities. The alumni database is intended to promote alumni identity and solidarity, thus effectively promoting school operations.

**LEARNING: THE LIFETIME WARRANTY CONCEPT**

In Taiwan, adult education has been promoted and developed to implement a lifelong learning society. The adult is the object of adult education. Adult education refers to systematic, continuous learning activities intended to promote personal knowledge, skills, attitudes, and changing values. The 1976 UNESCO definition of adult education is that it represents the history of organized education, regardless of its content, standards, and formal or non-formal methods. It is a substitute for school education or extended school education, which aims to provide adults with education to develop their potential, enrich their knowledge, improve technology, enhance their professional qualifications, guide their access to new developments, or to produce a change in attitudes and behavior (Huang, 2000a). In the traditional linear concept of education, education, work, and other activities are divided into the various stages of life. By contrast, the concept of lifelong learning is based on adult education and emphasizes that personal lifelong learning contributes to all aspects of personal change through knowledge, skills, and attitude changes.

Promoting adult education helps adults to adapt to changing times and society, enhances their abilities, and improves the education in Taiwan. Since the 1990s, Taiwanese society has undergone substantial demographic changes—supply and demand have affected education because of a low birth rate and an aging society. However, liberal university policies have rapidly increased the number of universities, meaning that many colleges and universities (particularly science and technology universities) are often faced with insufficient enrollment and funding problems. Creating a lifelong learning society and promoting adult education has resulted in many schools pursuing a new education direction to ensure excellent teachers and adequate equipment, but enrollment has been irregular. In the future, many universities will focus on adult education.

To serve their alumni, a school can encourage two types of adult education: recurrent education and continuing education. The Swedish Minister of Education, Olof Palme, proposed the concept of recurrent education. Recurrent education occurs when an adult occasionally returns to school to participate in education and alternates between education and working throughout his or her career. Its function is to provide in-service reflux training and help improve individual skills, attitudes, and values. Therefore, the concept of recurrent education based on educational opportunities must extend to all aspects of an individual's life. Extending the length of an education and expanding the breadth of knowledge, which is consistent with the concept of lifelong learning, is a practical strategy for achieving lifelong learning (Zhan, 2005). In Taiwan, recurrent education includes reflux extension education. Continuing education means that adults continue to participate in educational activities after leaving the formal school system, emphasizing educational activities that continue resistance. It occurs when individuals participate in educational activities after completing their full-time formal education. It is particularly used to refer to a university or professional organization that provides educational activities (Huang, 2000b). Most
continuing professional education emphasizes the ability to continue to perform by updating personal knowledge and professional skills. Health care workers often engage in continuing professional education. In the traditional, linear, and one-off education system, the education mission of a school ends after graduation. However, the concept of lifelong education uses adult education to alter the original rigid education system, allowing students to return to learning. Lifelong education is driven by the personal career education, work, leisure, and retirement cycle experienced by students who engage in reflux learning activities (Chen, 2008). The educational mission of a school should not end when students leave, but a school should provide opportunities for continued learning and help alumni improve their abilities and chances of promotion; therefore, maintaining the relationship between a school and its alumni is critical.

When an alumnus returns to his or her alma mater to pursue adult education, they access new knowledge and skills to cope with workplace requirements and ensure future promotion, they return to a familiar environment to learn, and they are less likely to encounter problems adapting to a new environment. Schools that encourage return alumni education solve their admission shortfalls caused by low birth rates and encourage alumni relationships. Adult Education offers alumni a service with a lifetime warranty, allowing their knowledge and skills to constantly increase. When alumni capacity improves, industry and society evaluations positively impact a school.

**ALUMNI RELATIONS AND CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT**

Improving alumni relations and strengthening alumni management are crucial. The following section presents a discussion of the customer relationship management (CRM) theory.

**Alumni Relationship Manager**

The Latin word alumnus means a son or ward. When extended to education, it refers to school graduates (Li, 2009). Alumni can also be more broadly interpreted as friends of a school, referring to past and present students, teachers, and staff; school vendors; local communities; and people who share the philosophy of a school. But the narrow definition of present or past students, teachers, and staff is the most commonly used meaning of the word.

1. Alumni resources

   Alumni resources refer to the human, financial, and material resources associated with alumni. Information and other social relationships influence the value of these resources. According to their functional classification, alumni resources can be divided into image or brand, information, financial, media, and educational resources (Lai, 2008):

   (1) Image Resources: alumni work performance, personal reputations, and other image perceptions in a community indirectly affect the brand image of an alma mater.

   (2) Information Resources: all types of alumni can provide effective information, form large information networks, and provide business development opportunities for schools.

   (3) Media Resources: alumni can also publicize their alma mater through various channels, or provide employment, recruiter, entrepreneurship, education, and other resources.

   (4) Financial Resources: alumni can donate money or supplies to assist with school development.

   (5) Educational Resources: alumni can use their school, work, and social experiences to make recommendations to their alma mater. Students can also refer to these experiences if necessary.

   Alumni are not only a living sign of a school, but they also connect a school and a community. Because alumni come from various industries and geographic areas, are sources of different types of
information, and can financial and business school feedback functions, they are extremely valuable to a school.

2. Establishing strong alumni relationships

Alumni include students who have graduated and currently enrolled students. The social image and identity of a school affects the school brand. Therefore, strong school and alumni relationship management improves service quality and enhances student solidarity. According to Yu Hui-Fen(2006), student satisfaction and reliable schools foster alumni loyalty. Greater alumni abilities and achievements reflect high quality personnel training and increase the visibility and credibility of a school. Alumni return to support a school, thus developing the school, creating more opportunities for mutual cooperation and development (Li, 2010). Schools can create lifelong value for students through education. Alumni can also create sustainable value for a school by providing material or immaterial feedback. If a school can enhance the quality of teaching, general services, and alumni services, students, alumni, teachers, and staff can experience close relationships to strengthen their identities and the concept of alumni obligations (Yan, 2012).

Several approaches exist to establishing strong alumni relationships (Deng, Ren and Yang, 2009;Yan, 2012):

(1) Maintaining linkages between alumni and their alma mater.
(2) Establishing sound management organization of alumni relations.
(3) Strengthening personalized alumni services.
(4) Strengthening emotional communication between alumni and a school.
(5) Enhancing comprehensive assessment and feedback mechanisms.

As well as these approaches, a school must ensure that educational institutions provide lifelong learning opportunities for alumni. Schools should set up appropriate refresher courses and provide alumni with opportunities to return to their alma mater and participate in adult education to update their knowledge and skills, increase their opportunities for advancement through education, and improve their competitiveness.

The relationship between alumni and their alma mater is long term and dynamic. Although school life influences the relationship between alumni and a school, a school can maintain and improve the quality of their relationship through continued operation and management (Yu, 2006). To manage alumni, foster an emotional connection, and enhance the educational quality and continuous operation and management of a school, alumni organizations, databases, community platforms, event invitations, and other methods of enhancing alumni identity are also essential.

Customer relationship management

CRM is a business process that integrates information technology. Many methods exist for efficiently and sustainably obtaining customer information, using accurate information from existing and potential customers to predict and respond to customer requirements, and emphasizing a customer-oriented approach. Swift (2000) stated that CRM requires meaningful communication, understanding and influencing customer behavior to attract new customers, preventing the loss of existing customers, improving customer loyalty, and increasing customer profitability. Bhatia (1999) believed that CRM is using software and related technology support for sales, marketing, customer service, and support in areas such as automation and business process improvement. CRM application software also integrates customer communication channels, such as face to face, telephonic, and Internet channels, allowing organizations to use the preferred mode of a customer. Chen Wen-Hua (2000) proposed that CRM is a large collection of information
technology that stores customer information, analyzes useful information, and uses this information to aid decision making and planning-related business activities.

Figure 1 shows that CRM architecture can be divided into front-end communication, core operations, back-end analysis, and databases. Complete customer service process analysis can establish comprehensive data warehouses and perform data mining and analysis.

![Figure 1: CRM integration framework](image)

Front-end communication can improve the effectiveness of customer interactions. Computer-telephony integration and call center interactions reflect consumer experiences and measure customer satisfaction with products and services. Technology provides multiple communication channels to meet customer requirements and save human resources. Core operations aimed at improving internal operations and customer management uses various management modules to solve tasks and record relevant information in a database to facilitate data integration and future query resolution. Back-end analysis is targeted at transactions, events, and other information to be analyzed and is used to understand customer activities, behaviors, preferences, and trends for providing effective feedback to front-end communications and core operations. The main back-end analysis tools include data warehousing and data mining. Data warehousing refers to screening and converting various data that is stored in the back-end database. Transaction records from the front-end system and basic customer information from the back-end database are linked to form a dynamic query database. The data warehouse is based on data mining. Computer-based statistical computation and analysis and multi-angle cross-analysis of large amounts of data filtered by relevance or rules are used to perform advanced analyses of customer classifications, clustering, behavior predictions, and sensitivities (Liu, 2008).
CRM, particularly data processing and applications, can be broadly classified as data or information collection, storage, sorting, and application (Liu, 2008). CRM focuses on implementing customer knowledge management by accumulating customer information; using data warehousing, data mining, and other technologies for data analysis; and looking for relationships between different variables to encourage better marketing and marketing policies.

**Customer relationship management and alumni database applications**

The purpose of business is to pursue profits and target customers in the market. Schools are nonprofit organizations that are subject to laws and government regulations. Many schools have recently begun to face operational problems. Coupled with the impact of market-oriented education, many schools have implemented reforms, integrated enterprise management concepts with school management strategies, and actively improved school performance and strengthened school competitiveness. Since the marketization of higher education, higher education organizations have attempted to become service providers by providing quality services to all students and emphasizing student satisfaction. Because education has a special mission and purpose, schools should not try to meet the needs of customers, but pursue social marketing-oriented policies that focus on meeting individual student needs. This will benefit students and the entire community in the long term (Yang, 2007). In a knowledge society, it is the mission of a school to provide alumni with lifelong learning opportunities and meet their education and learning requirements.

Generally, the identity of a school affects the loyalty of a school's alumni. The more alumni agree with school policies, the more satisfied they are with a school, and the more likely they are to support a school. However, because alumni live in diverse areas, CRM is required to manage and strengthen alumni relationships.

**Creating a personalized database**

In this study, a VIdegree cloud management system was used as an alumni database. The concept of CRM for alumni relationship management integration and promotion of adult education was explored to assess its benefits for private vocational school development. VIdegree functions that were applied to the alumni database included:

1. Customizing the following customer data fields: “contact detail types,” “extended attributes,” “anniversary types,” “relationship types,” and “keywords.” Depending on their requirements, schools could develop and include alumni database items, such as basic personal information, school class, courses, school grades, participation record, or present occupation.
2. A comprehensive data retention mechanism for records and customer-related matters was used to establish a working log. Related work items can be assigned through letters, programs, and systems to notify the relevant personnel for processing.
3. The “tab settings” were used to classify the nature of the customers. This feature can be used to identify the targeted customer base tag in the massive database to convey the correct message.
4. Customer service staff can use comprehensive database systems built for call centers to access customer information and consumer history. In an alumni setting, staff can immediately access alumni information, which conserves human resources and decreases query response times.
5. Analyzing connections to explore potential customers. Through the database analysis system, the alumni database can be used to recover alumni contact details, increasing the completeness of alumni resources.
Technological information system functions are used to achieve effective alumni relationship management, expand school management, and increase school competitiveness.

Establishing and protecting data

1. Data creation

The CRM data warehouse build process moves data from the source database to the data warehouse schema, and merges data from various sources to facilitate analysis. When selecting information, duplication and excess production should be avoided to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the data (Liu, 2008).

To establish an alumni database, the content required for planning must be set, and unnecessary or duplicate information must be deleted. Generally, an alumni database should include:

(1) Basic information, such as name, date of birth, gender, and contact details.

(2) In-school experience, such as classes, courses, school performance, competition, and awards.

(3) Employment-related information, such as wage records, work records, and licenses.

These data and tab settings can be used to categorize data quickly. An alumni database should apply to all current students, the Continuing Education Division, graduates, teachers, and other staff. A personal database should be built when alumni enroll in a school or college. Past data and information from leavers should also be collected. If schools have special considerations, vendors, community residents, and parents can also be included in a database to extend its content.

2. Data management and personal data protection

Legal privacy requirements mean that personal data can only be used with the consent of the individual. A database must manage and protect privacy and establish and improve information security management by building firewalls and using other measures to prevent data loss. A privacy protection policy should be formulated and improved and a system log should record user activity to avoid abuse.

When customer service staff engages with clients over the telephone or Internet, they must use a comprehensive inquiry mechanism to seek customer consent to enter their information on the customer database. Customers then know that their personal information will be protected.

Personalized services and promotion of adult education

Current adult and continuing education services in Taiwan include tutor training, job training degree courses, credit courses, noncredit courses, and 2-year Bachelor of Technology courses. These varied courses are taught using complex and diverse teaching methods. Therefore, to implement a lifelong learning education philosophy, a school should create a lifetime service for past, present, and future students. A school could create and implement suitable training courses to develop alumni careers.

Personal service is crucial to CRM. Customer demand for personalized service content strengthens the relationship between enterprises and customers. Schools can also categorize alumni by using alumni database labels through personalized messages transmitted through Internet communities or email. Tailored information services increase alumni interest in an alma mater, strengthening the relationship between a school and its alumni. By using an alumni database and VIdegree, a school can provide appropriate personal services to alumni by applying database analysis. Schools can communicate a personal dynamic message, the latest industry news, employment information, and surveys to collect appropriate feedback and suggestions to facilitate school development. For example, the system can send a questionnaire to alumni who have completed a course to inform them of school curriculum planning. The system could...
analyze the situation based on alumni responses to assist the curriculum department or teachers. To promote adult education, an alumni database can reach more set up and promotion programs and personal initiatives.

1. Recommending personalized curricula

An alumni database with data collection and data integration capabilities can provide more efficient and accurate data analysis and automatically assess the personal suitability of information and effective use of discriminant function integration and database personalization. It can be used to understand how alumni courses fit with other programs, promote degree courses, provide advice, and recommend suitable courses to alumni. Through data collection and integration, individual alumni can learn from their experiences, attend courses, provide questionnaire feedback, and more accurately analyze the content of adult education courses they require.

2. Actively promoting adult education

By analyzing the alumni database, emails or SMSs can be sent to alumni on courses of interest and recommended initiatives to encourage alumni to learn. In traditional adult education, a school is in a passive position and waits for students to enroll. An alumni database can be used to analyze individual requirements, statistics, and appropriate course integration. It can also be used to recommend appropriate courses to alumni, thus promoting adult education.

3. Implementing lifelong learning with a lifetime warranty

School education does not end when a student graduates. Lifelong education also includes alumni services. The relationship between a school and its students should uphold the concept of alumni, lifelong alumni." Schools should provide various educational opportunities for personal career development, using several database functions to promote the relationship between students and a school. At any time, alumni can enroll in training courses or return to school to maintain workplace competitiveness. Through adult education a school can continue to maintain graduate quality and improve the personal growth and career development of students.

CONCLUSION

Private vocational colleges mostly focus on recruiting new students, often overlooking the importance of alumni resources. If schools provide lifetime educational opportunities, this helps to maintain their competitiveness and contribute to the growth of adult education by improving their brand image. Alumni can provide resources to their alma mater, such as financial contributions, but they can also provide employment opportunities for students and build the reputation of the school. Therefore, it is crucial for schools to maintain strong alumni relationships.

Alumni associations can use database management systems to include current students, graduates, and staff in the scope of services. Alumni databases can be used to increase alumni satisfaction with a school and strengthen alumni loyalty and solidarity, encouraging alumni to support their alma mater. High-quality services promote effective brand building and stable development of a school, allowing schools to overcome the challenges of social competition and achieve sustainable management.

Social changes mean that adult education and a lifelong learning society are essential educational philosophies. Integrating databases and analysis, proactively recommending refresher courses, and maintaining the number of foreign students after graduation strengthens the link between a school and its alumni and enables them to complement each other. Schools should achieve sustainable management by leveraging their alumni resources and by promoting education.
REFERENCES


