



CONNECT

A Guide to Alumni Chapter Communications

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Sigma Nu Fraternity, Inc.

9 N. Lewis Street

Lexington, Virginia 24450

Phone: (540) 463-1869

Fax: (540) 463-1669

What it Means to CONNECT

Connect: *to bring together or into contact so that a real or notional link is established.*

Connecting alumni brothers is a vital component of an alumni chapter. For the purposes of this resource the term *connect* has two strategic purposes:

1. The definition above aptly depicts the purpose and importance of alumni chapters in Sigma Nu. Chapter designation is an alumnus' first connection to the Fraternity; therefore, alumni chapters are a vital link between alumni brothers and the General Fraternity.
2. Many Sigma Nu alumni have lost connection with their chapter and the Fraternity; therefore, it is imperative that they be re-connected. To do that, communication will be the key mechanism to bringing them "...into contact so that a real link..." can be established.



Importance of Communication

Communication is the first step to all alumni engagement, so consider the question, "How do alumni know if they want to be involved if they don't know what's going on?"

The simple answer is they do not. Sigma Nu has more than 190,000 living alumni and most of them do not receive consistent communication about their chapters. However, surveys show that 75% of alumni are interested in receiving updates about their collegiate chapter and fellow alumni. Moreover, the loyalty of alumni lies first with their chapter, which makes the alumni chapter an integral part of keeping them connected to the chapter and Sigma Nu.

Ultimately, consistent communication builds interest.

Interest improves involvement.

Involvement strengthens the organization's ability to achieve its goals and purpose.



The Parts of a Communication Plan

Building a Contact List

Building a contact list is the crucial first step to establishing an effective communication plan, and Sigma Nu is committed to assisting the alumni chapter in this effort.

At the beginning of a new academic year, the General Fraternity will provide each active alumni chapter with a listing of all living chapter alumni. For those alumni chapters that already have a contact list, the General Fraternity list offers an opportunity to sync their list with the General Fraternity. For those alumni chapters that do not have an internal contact list, the General Fraternity list can be a starting point to begin their own.

It is important to note that in today's digital world, personal contact information is a valuable commodity; therefore, **it is imperative that the contact listing provided is utilized for alumni chapter business ONLY. It is not to be used for personal gain or provided to any outside party.**

Contact List Info.

- Full Name (First & Last)
- Chapter and Badge #
- Phone Number (Primary)
- Email Address (Primary)
- Mailing Address (Optional)

The Alumni Chapter Newsletter

PRODUCTION SCHEDULE AND FREQUENCY

At minimum, the alumni chapter should be producing and sending an annual newsletter / update to the alumni brothers of the chapter. When to send the newsletter is a matter for the alumni chapter leadership to decide, but consistency of the send date is important.

One recommendation would be to send an annual newsletter in the mid-July to mid-August time frame, or in the mid-January to mid-February timeframe.

- **July / August send** – marks the start of the academic year for the collegiate chapter and renewed excitement about what can be accomplished, for both the collegiate and alumni chapters, is high. Additionally, July / August is a great time to announce important dates for the academic year so alumni can mark them on their calendars.
- **January / February send** – marks, for many collegiate chapters, the start of new officer terms, which brings its own level of renewed excitement. Like the July / August timeframe, January / February is also a great time to announce important dates for the calendar year.

Using the same timeframes of July / August and January / February works well for those alumni chapters that wish to send two newsletters during the year.

Regardless of the number of newsletters produced each year, it is important that the production schedule and send date(s) remain consistent year-over-year.

NEWSLETTER CONTENT

There is no doubt that alumni want to know how things are going with their collegiate chapter, but they also want to know about their fellow alumni, especially those with whom they were in the chapter. That is why the “class notes” section is one of the most read segments of alumni magazines for colleges and universities. For alumni chapter newsletters, it is recommended that the content distribution be as follows:

- **70% about alumni and the alumni chapter.**
 - Alumni chapter highlights – accomplishments, plans, upcoming events, etc.
 - Spotlight feature on the good work(s) of a fellow alumnus – this section of a newsletter will require a solicitation prior to publication to gather the actual content.
 - A listing of the alumni chapter officers – including name, badge, position, and email or phone number should be a consistent presence in every newsletter.
 - Announcement of the next annual meeting – date, location, and time (if possible; but date, at minimum).
- **20% about the collegiate chapter and brothers.**
 - Highlights of the collegiate chapter – accomplishments from the past academic term / semester; goals and plans for the upcoming term / semester, etc.
 - Listing of the collegiate chapter officers – including name badge, position, and email or phone number should be a consistent piece of every newsletter.
 - Call to Action / Support – collegiate chapters have a lot going on and there is usually some aspect of their efforts for which they could use additional support – facilitators for LEAD sessions, fill a role on the Alumni Advisory Board, a volunteer for a career development panel for graduating brothers, requests for referrals of potential new members, or it may simply be to promote alumni attendance at a chapter event, such as initiation.
- **10% of the content should be a concise story focused on a single important issue or development about the Fraternity and/or college / university.**
 - It is important that alumni be aware of these issues because of their potential impact or opportunities.

Newsletter Content

- Alumni & Alumni Chapter News – 70%
- Collegiate Chapter News – 20%
- Fraternity / University News – 10%

SENDING THE NEWSLETTER – TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Generally, there are two readily available methods to send an alumni newsletter – US Postal Service (hard copy) and digitally (email / social media). There are benefits and drawbacks to both; however, sending these newsletters digitally has become highly efficient and cost effective.

The following are some email / digital newsletter services that alumni chapters may find beneficial to their communication efforts. Most of these providers also include some templates in their free services.

Provider / Service	Pricing	Free Plan Available	Free / Starter Plans: Subscribers / Emails
<u>Constant Contact</u>	Starts at \$20/mo.	No	500 contacts / unlimited emails
<u>Mailchimp</u>	Starts at \$20/mo.	Yes	2,000 contacts / 10,000 emails per month
<u>Mailer Lite</u>	Starts at \$10/mo.	Yes	1,000 contacts / unlimited emails
<u>Moosend</u>	Starts at \$10/mo.	Yes	1,000 contacts / unlimited emails
<u>SendPulse</u>	Starts at \$8/mo.	Yes	500 contacts / unlimited emails

Connecting Face-to-Face: The Alumni Chapter Annual Meeting

From time to time, it is important that the alumni chapter come together to meet for the purpose of conducting alumni chapter business. The alumni chapter does not need to meet, in person, as frequently as a collegiate chapter, but it is important that such a meeting occur annually, at minimum.

While this expectation is implicit in [The Law of Sigma Nu Fraternity, Inc.](#), it does exist in Article 8, Section 5 (Election and Term of Office).

“As near as possible, the elections and terms of office shall conform to The LAW to the election and term of office of the corresponding Collegiate Chapters officers.”

This statute of [The Law of Sigma Nu Fraternity, Inc.](#) does not dictate when elections are to be held but, generally, collegiate chapters hold elections on an annual basis; therefore, for an alumni chapter to “...conform to The LAW related to the election and term of office of the corresponding Collegiate Chapter officers,” it is best served to hold an annual meeting that incorporates the election of officers.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Face-to-face meetings are not always possible for an alumni chapter. Fortunately, the advent of virtual meeting platforms now makes it much easier to include those alumni whose schedules will not allow them to be there in person.

Slack's [Ultimate Guide to Digital Meetings](#) offers tips and advice on how to set up and run an effective virtual meeting. However, the alumni chapter should not engage in the use of *Ritual* when meeting virtually as it is not possible to use the *Ritual* items as prescribed by ceremony. Also, when using certain services, the meeting can be, and sometimes is automatically, recorded.

If possible, using a platform that allows video is encouraged. Not only does video help participants to stay better engaged but it also allows those individuals who are reporting to "show" the progress made on projects by sharing their screen.

An Online Presence

Digital communication continues to be on the rise and having an online presence has become a standard for any organized entity. Making use of these online opportunities includes some definite benefits:

- **Large Pool** – easy connection to many alumni.
- **Efficiency** – posting a communication online can be done quickly.
- **Improved Odds of the "Smaller World"** – the growth of social media has shrunk the digital world to the point that finding a lost brother has become much easier.

THE PURPOSE OF ONLINE CHANNELS

Social media and websites have their individual places. Websites are great for general information that does not change. On the other hand, websites are not the greatest for providing quick updates about evolving situations and issues. Social media platforms, though, are tremendous tools for quick updates and announcements.

A key component to effective use of social media platforms is identifying the purpose of each channel / platform. For example:

- [Facebook](#) is a great platform for longer forms of updates and announcements that makes the inclusion of pictures easy. It is very effective for updates about individuals, events, and projects. (Resource: [How to Create a Facebook Group](#))
- [Instagram](#) is a picture-based platform; therefore, it does not lend itself well to sharing news and updates. It is, however, a great platform for sharing pictures from events and short snippets of information. (Resource: [How to Create an Instagram Group](#))
- [Twitter](#) allows for short, detailed bits of information, but is less picture-based. This platform can be great for announcements and can easily link to additional information. (Resource: [How to use Twitter Lists](#))

Virtual Meeting Platform Options

- [Google Meet](#) – up to 10 users can meet on-demand.
- [Skype](#) – similar features to Google, allowing 10 or less users without paying for a business account.
- [Zoom](#) – free video conferencing for up to 100 people, time is limited to 40 minutes with the free version.
- [FreeConferenceCall](#) – free conference call solution by phone or web, share your screen, and chat. Up to 1,000 call participants and 5 web participants with free version.

The use of multiple online platforms may seem attractive to some as doing so may increase the likelihood of a more alumni seeing the information. However, more platforms mean more to manage and more content to be created or replicated in a manner that fits the alumni chapter's purpose for each platform. Ultimately, an alumni chapter is probably best served to identify one platform that connects with the largest number of its alumni and focus on that platform until it needs, and is ready, to add any additional platforms to its communication structure.

CONTENT SCHEDULE

One of the benefits of social media platforms is how simple it is to push out content, which can be done from most smartphones. In the age of social media, how often new content is pushed through the various platforms is important to keep your alumni chapter members (followers) engaged.

An alumni chapter's purpose for a particular social media platform will help determine how frequently new content needs to be developed for that platform. Again, the use of multiple online platforms may seem attractive, but more platforms mean more to manage.

EXAMPLE CONTENT SCHEDULE FOR ONLINE PLATFORMS

Platform	Purpose	Update
Website	Organizational information and repository of newsletters	Biannual review with updates as needed
Facebook	Updates, news, and announcements	Weekly
Instagram	Pictorial updates of events and projects	As needed, post event and milestones
Twitter	Announcements and reminders	As needed, per event / project, communication plan(s)

Some final reminders about maintaining an online presence:

1. **The internet is forever and "delete" does not guarantee it is deleted.** Put another way, carefully consider the content being posted.
2. **"Private" is not necessarily private.** While websites and some social media platforms are, by nature "open," other platforms allow for "private" groups, but any content could be reposted outside of the group. Again, carefully consider the content being posted.

The Importance of Connecting, Revisited

Communicating with fellow alumni is THE most important thing an alumni chapter can do in its effort to engaged fellow alumni. Everything else builds from the ability to communicate and share information because, simply put, no one gets involved in something they do not know anything about.

Consistency will be a key factor to the communication effort of engaging alumni brothers to the efforts of the alumni chapter – it cannot “start and stop” – but it does not have to be burdensome either. If the alumni know the alumni chapter newsletter comes out in August, then, over time, they will begin to expect it and look forward to reading it. As they grow accustomed to short, ongoing updates and announcements coming through social media, the probability of them voicing their thoughts increases. Put another way, the more people ingest information that interest them, the more likely they are to want to be involved.





**Sigma Nu
Fraternity**

**EXCELLING
WITH HONOR**

9 North Lewis Street
P.O. Box 1869
Lexington, Virginia 24450
Phone: (540) 463-1869
Fax: (540) 463-1669
Email: headquarters@sigmanu.org