



# Creating Online Alumni Programs for a COVID-19 World

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Presented by Zach Rubin



# Agenda

- Introduction and About Us
- Two Big Takeaways
- What does COVID-19 mean for Alumni Relations?
- Overall Strategy for Success
- Online Engagement Strategies
  - Alumni Webinars and Livestreams
  - Alumni Podcasts
  - Online Alumni Book Clubs
- Conclusion, Questions and Discussion



# Introduction

Zach Rubin

*Co-Founder and CEO*  
Professional Book Club Guru

*Executive Director*  
Alumni Learning Consortium





# About Us - Professional Book Club Guru

- Began in 2015
- Manages online alumni book clubs for more than 150 colleges and universities around the world
- Mission is all about lifelong learning and helping people on their journey of lifelong learning



# About Us - Alumni Learning Consortium

- Partnership of more than 30 alumni associations working together to create more and better online programming for their alumni
- Membership includes:
  - Platform to create webinars and livestream events so schools can create their own content
  - White label webinars which are created centrally and are open to alumni of all member schools
- Able to bring top speakers to alumni based on the size of the network



# Big Takeaway #1

*Online alumni engagement is essential to alumni relations beyond the immediate needs presented by COVID-19*

- Most alumni do not attend traditional alumni events and programs when they are happening
- Alumni expect simple and on-demand solutions to their needs which are best met with technology
- Online engagement was valuable before COVID-19



# Big Takeaway #2

*Lifelong learning is a place where alumni offices can add value beyond traditional social and networking events*

- Lifelong learning is the most common phrase in university mission statements
- Schools have an advantage in creating lifelong learning content rather than trying to compete with Facebook for keeping up with friends or LinkedIn for professional networking



# What does COVID-19 mean for Alumni Relations?

Three areas to cover:

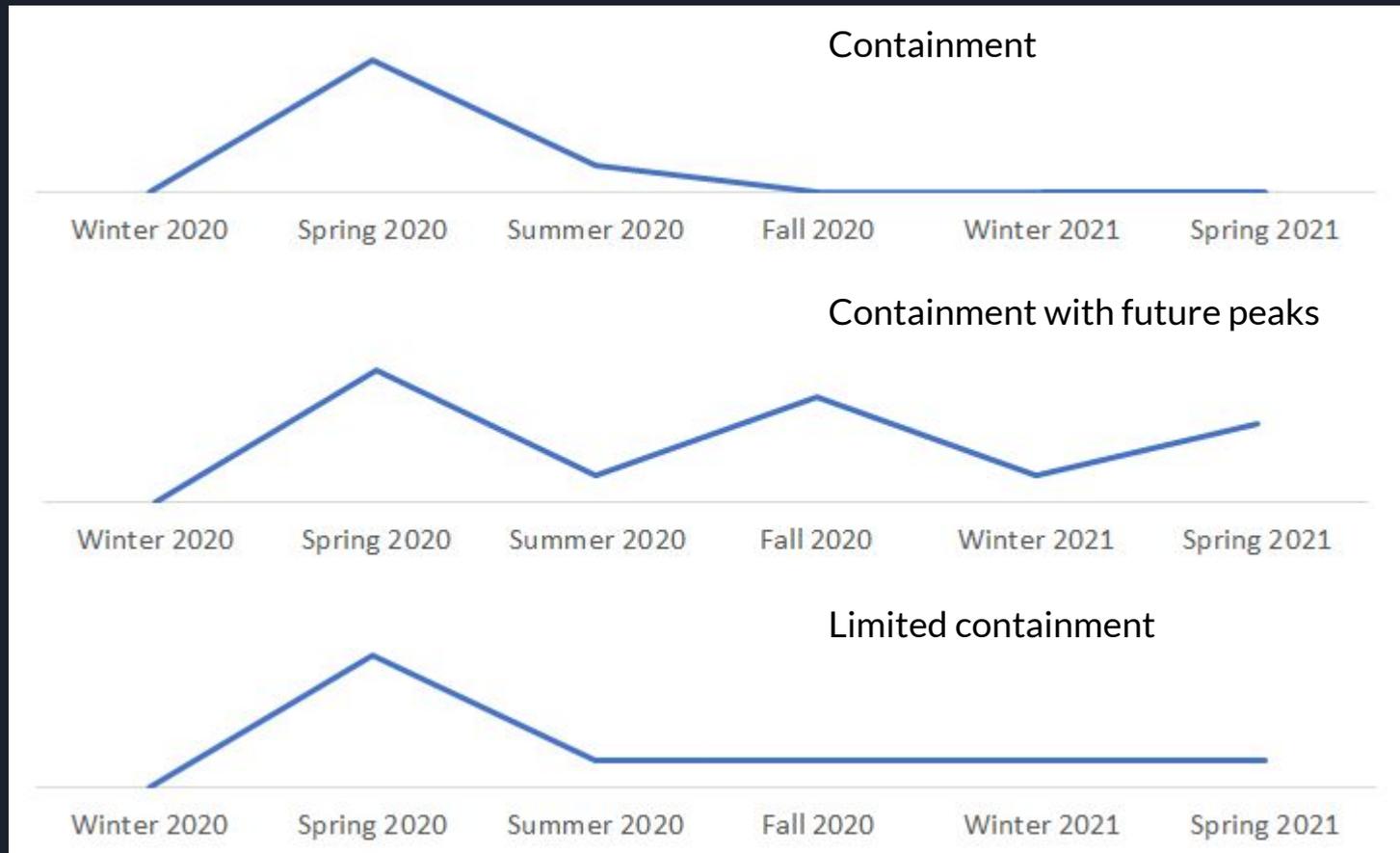
1. Don't be too hard on yourselves
2. When will this end?
3. What this means for alumni engagement programming?



# Don't Be Too Hard On Yourself

- All of this is unprecedented
- Your alumni will understand and still care about the institution when this is over
- This is an opportunity to support your alumni

# When Will This End?





# What this means for alumni engagement programming?

- Very hard to plan
- Waiting for certainty won't be possible until there is a vaccine
- Nimble planning is required
  - Programming you can implement quickly
  - Programs you can sustain when things return to normal
  - Be ready to try things, fail, and keep trying



# Overall Strategy for Success

	Less Budget	More Budget
Less Staff Time	Communicate honestly with your alumni, try not to stress.	Invest in ready made alumni engagement tools.
More Staff Time	Take advantage of free platforms and tools to create online programs.	Invest in ready made alumni engagement tools and create more custom online programs.



# Online Engagement Strategies

We'll review webinars and livestreams, podcasts and online book clubs:

- What are they
- Free, low cost and full service options for each
- Tips for success



# Webinars and Livestreams

- Best replacement for more traditional events at this time
- Livestreaming is media that is simultaneously recorded and broadcast online in real time
- Webinars are a form of livestreaming
- Content is typically recorded for later viewing



# Livestreaming vs Webinars

- You can host webinars with a livestreaming platform but you can't livestream events with a webinar platform
- You can livestream physical events
  - Alumni/Faculty/ Panel Speakers
  - Stewardship Events (e.g. donors dinner)
  - Homecoming Parade
  - Presidential Addresses
  - Religious/Choir Services
- Livestreaming offers unlimited events and participants while webinar platforms typically have limits



# Free and Low Cost Webinar Platform Options

- [freeconferencecall.com](https://freeconferencecall.com) is free and you can have up to 1,000 participants for a screen share
- Zoom, GoToMeeting, Webex or other online meeting tools you already have
  - Number of attendees is likely limited to 100 or less
- Won't give you data analytics, event registration or send reminder emails



# Free and Low Cost Livestream Platform Options

- Open Broadcaster Software is free and has lots of great guides online
- [golightstream.com](https://golightstream.com) has a free version or a much better paid version for \$25 per month
- Unlimited events and participants on YouTube Live and/or Facebook Live
- Won't give you data analytics, event registration or send reminder emails
- Sending people to a social media site to view your content can lead them to click away



# Full Service Webinar Platform Options

- Zoom Webinar, GoToWebinar, BigMarker
- Sends reminder emails leading up to events
- Provides individual participation and analytics
- More branding options and features to enhance your content
- Doesn't allow for livestreaming
- \$2,500 to \$10,000+ per year depending on size of the institution



# Full Service Livestream Platform Options

## Alumni Learning Consortium

- Combines best parts of livestreaming with webinar platform
- Unlimited events and participants
- Includes white label webinars branded for your school
- Microsite where all of your content lives, alumni can register, sends reminder emails and all data tracking
- \$2,500 to \$5,500 per year depending on size of school



# Equipment for Webinars and Livestreams

- For webinars, all you need is a webcam with a microphone and your computer
- For livestreaming a physical event:
  - Reliable internet connection
  - Camera that plugs into your computer
  - Tripod
  - Microphone to capture event sound
  - Microphone receiver to plug into your computer if the camera microphone is insufficient

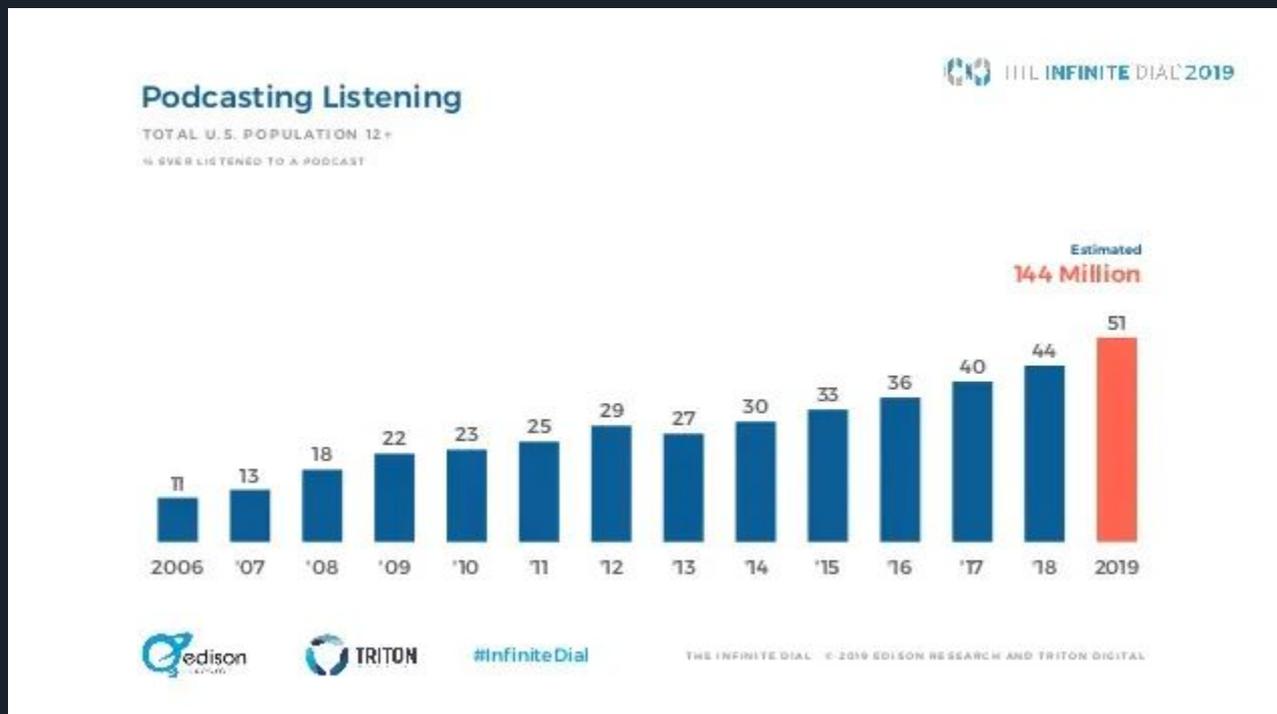


# Webinar and Livestream Tips for Success

- Sound quality matters more than video quality
- Complete practice runs with co-presenters
- Valuable to have a mix of professional/career development topics as well as interesting lifelong learning (e.g. faculty research talks)
- Make the recordings available
- Ask alumni what they want

# Podcasts

- Prerecorded audio programs
- A lot like a 21st century alumni magazine





# Podcast Benefits

- People can listen at their convenience while driving, at the gym, doing housework, etc.
- People tend to listen to series on an ongoing basis rather than single episodes so generally high engagement for a subset of alumni
- Software and distribution is free with low-cost tools that make things even easier



# Podcast Tools

- [Freeconferencecall.com](https://www.freeconferencecall.com) or your own online meeting tool to record phone interviews
- Audacity is a free tool for sound editing your content
- Buzzsprout posts your content to the most popular podcast directories and gives valuable aggregate analytics for \$12 to \$24 per month



# Podcast Tips for Success

- Keep them short, 20 to 30 minutes per episode
- Record them in quieter times of the year such as summer and winter but release them weekly in “seasons”
- Consider a theme for each season such as:
  - History of the university
  - Improving society
  - Advice from alumni
- Focus on content people can’t get anywhere else



# Should you start a podcast now?

- Podcast listening is down as most people listen on their commutes or at the gym
- Webinars are likely to give you better engagement both short and long term

However, they are a low cost and effective alumni engagement tool so now is a great time to start and learn the technology if you have the staff time



# Online Alumni Book Clubs

Works just like an in-person book club except all of the discussion takes place through an online forum



Participate  
Anywhere



Participate  
Anytime



Scalable



# By the Numbers

1% - 5%

Alumni opt into an  
online book club  
program

60%

Participants who  
have never been  
engaged before

70%

Alumni still  
engaged after a  
year



# Involving Faculty and Alumni Authors

- Select books by alumni or faculty authors
- Have the author record a short video with discussion questions to post
- Ask Me Anything post in online discussion
- Webinar or talk related to the book by the author or a faculty expert
- Don't recommend only reading books by community authors



# Self-Managing an Online Alumni Book Club

- Free to manage on your own with private Facebook or Goodreads group
- Critical to have people register and send regular updates and new discussion questions
- Break the reading down into sections with different discussion questions focused on each
- Structure the group as a continuing community
- *Need to pick books that people want to read*



# Full Service Online Alumni Book Club Option

## Work with PBC Guru

- Team of book club managers that read the books, create discussion questions, keep the schedule and send regular emails to participants
- Provide high-quality online platform for program
- Can read books by alumni and faculty
- Sustainable over the long term because it only takes a few hours of staff time per year

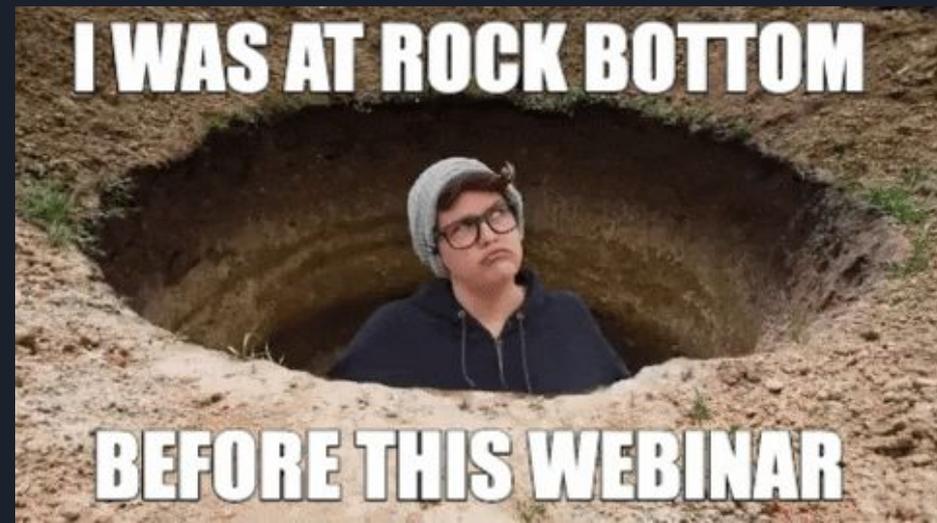


# Other programming ideas

- Online mentoring platforms
- Cohort mentoring programs (doesn't require a platform)
- Mission Collaborative
- Online networking events (e.g. Brazen)

# Conclusions

- Don't stress too much, your alumni will understand
- It's important to create more online programs but plan them as part of your long-term strategy, not a stopgap
- Online programming that is a combination of interesting, unique and valuable will resonate the most with your community



# Questions and Discussion

Zach Rubin  
zach@alumlc.org  
443-536-6465

