



ToucanTech

Case Study: Institute of Development Studies Alumni Network

About the Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) is a global research and learning organisation for equitable and sustainable change. IDS is ranked first in the world for development studies by the QS University Rankings, together with the University of Sussex. Also ranked best international development policy think tank. IDS has been working with partners to tackle complex development challenges in this way since 1966. The Institute is home to over 200 staff and 300 students at any one time. But the IDS community extends far beyond, encompassing an extensive global network of over 360 partners, 3,300 alumni and hundreds of former staff.

“Just have fun really. It is alumni, you can make it creative and interactive “

IDS Alumni Network Stats



Launched alumni network with ToucanTech: **2016**



4,500+ records stored on the IDS ToucanTech database, with **1,304** online members signed up to their network



272 new database records created in 2019



54% opt in rate from online members consenting to receive email communication from IDS



42% average email open rate for mass emails sent in the last 12 months



6,007 reads for the IDS popular weekly Yellow Monday newsletter





Michelle Cruickshank,
Alumni Relations
Officer at the Institute
of Development
Studies

How are you telling alumni about the IDS alumni site?

Take every opportunity. The IDS alumni community is very international – as well as emails from the alumni site we also communicate with our alumni via social media - particularly Facebook and Twitter. It's on every email the alumni office and on every branded item we order for the alumni office. We also work to make sure that students and PhD researchers engage with the website while they are at IDS.

How do you keep registered users coming back to visit the IDS network?

Our main hooks for logins are careers and mentoring, photos and a weekly staff/students newsletter called Yellow Monday. Most of our news and blogs do not require login. Keeping some of the content open for alumni visit. We focus more about communication and news article reads.

How are you encouraging users to fill out as much careers and education information as possible?

I believe through effective content and communication. I am lucky to have alumni who are happy to fill out this information on the registration form. Also, by getting alumni involved in the IDS Alumni Ambassadors, volunteers from different countries around the world. Sending emails to regional alumni to confirm their location. Simply starting an email by saying "I am sending this email because I think you are in London" will encourage them to go back to the site and fill out more details.

How successful has the IDS Alumni Ambassadors initiative been and how can a user find out about their local alumni ambassador?

Alumni Ambassadors were established in 2013 (around three years before the launch of our alumni website). They are our core group of volunteers and it would be impossible to do most of our alumni relations without them, because of the international nature of our alumni. We have a dedicated page with their contact email and link to their online profile and use a google map to show where they are in the World. As we share information about alumni with ambassadors, we get explicit permission to do this from our alumni via the permissions selection.

What are your plans for the new alumni network over the next year?

One thing we have noticed is that whenever we send an email with content of real interest, we see a spike in new signups, presumably from people who have been forwarded the email. To grow the number of Alumni registered on the network we are focusing on sending emails with links to stories and photos of real interest, which we hope will encourage them to engage with the network. Additionally our Archivist is curating lots of interesting material online to be shared through the network so that the portal both shines a mirror on the current life of the school and the lives of our former students and also acts as a window looking out onto the history of IDS.

We have 35 Ambassadors acting as IDS' first point of contact for international alumni. They help organize events, provide information or answer questions on local communities, general advice etc. IDS Alumni Ambassadors are social as well as professional volunteers.

What is (o has been) the most powerful tool/functionality on your ToucanTech database?

Communications is the most used feature on our ToucanTech system

- I use it to create and send **mass emails** and newsletters
- The **Activity Tracker** is like a memory jog of all logged activities on the site - great for reporting purposes
- I use the **Email Sync** to help me log fundraising – it makes it easier for my colleagues to identify and review any relations with potential donors
- The **forms function** has been a great way for alumni to update their information directly in to our ToucanTech database, by filling out the online forms
- Uploading **photos** is a great tool for alumni engagement. For example, IDS Panto albums attract lots of alumni log ins to see photographs

What lessons have you learned since launching the IDS site or other areas on your database or any tips for other ToucanTech customers?

- Make or find time to maintain your data if you have a busy schedule
- Have a maintenance plan in place to review your data (weekly or monthly or whatever works best for you)
- Reach out to other people working in Alumni/Development offices about what works for them via LinkedIn or other social media platforms
- Attend conferences/networking events. This is a great way to meet and share ideas with other ToucanTech customer
- Find time for training/webinars on areas relevant to your system
- Take time to step back and hear about what other ToucanTech customers have done for inspiration
- Just have fun really. It is alumni, you can make it creative and interactive
- Get Alumni involved in building and maintaining the website. For example, through competitions and ideas sharing. I have a strong that people should be rewarded for creating content, like our series of blogs written by current IDS masters students and PhD Researchers

<https://alumni.ids.ac.uk/news/blogs-perspectives-provocations-initiatives/512/512-Barricades-and-democratic-tsunami-in-Barcelona>



Take a look at the IDS Alumni Network
<https://alumni.ids.ac.uk/homepage>



About ToucanTech

ToucanTech is a community database software used by schools, companies and charities for alumni, careers, fundraising and marketing activities. Combining a flexible website and a powerful back-end database, it's an easy-to-use, all-in-one system.



Database

Import, filter, search and update records, create custom fields, forms and run complex reports



CRM

Track activity, measure engagement, capture consents, create postal labels, sync emails



Community

Connect your members (e.g. alumni, parents, supporters) on a private network, synced with social media



Email

Create and send beautiful email newsletters, tracking open stats, remove bounced emails, manage unsubscribes



Fundraising

Process and log donations, set up funds, log tax relief, run reports, track donors



News

Publish news stories and other content, tag people and share on social media



Gallery & Resources

Post photos, artwork, year books, magazines and tag, categories and share



Events

Plan your dinners, reunions and concerts, send reminders, book tickets, process payments



Mentoring

Feature mentors, post jobs, publish careers guides and news, allow students/ alumni to search for mentors and track interactions



Clubs/ Groups

Set up sub-groups within your network, with their own news and events