

Rowan University “Rowan Magazine” Summary

Tactic Category: 20. Magazines (Internal and External Audiences)

Overview

With a dedication to journalistic storytelling and engaging design, Rowan University’s alumni publication, *Rowan Magazine*, moved from a donor-congratulatory publication to an informative University-wide pride piece. Produced by a small staff and published twice a year, *Rowan Magazine* drives alumni participation, encourages gift giving and connects people to today’s Rowan University in a genuine way.

Rowan University “Rowan Magazine” Summary

Tactic Category: 20. Magazines (Internal and External Audiences)

Program Overview & Objectives

Situation Analysis

A selective, medium-sized public institution in southern New Jersey, Rowan University competes with many local institutions for brand recognition, top students, research dollars, talented faculty and monetary support. While the University implements a master communication plan that includes media relations, advertising and social media, a recent study conducted by Rachel Morton Associates, a communication strategist for education, explained that “an alumni magazine that reflects the ambitions and achievements of the university has been shown to result in increased alumni good will, involvement and eventually in financial support.” Because of this research, Rowan’s Division of University Relations prioritized the University’s alumni magazine, *Rowan Magazine*, and produces at least two issues on a regular basis to generate recognition and interest among the University’s constituents.

In the past seven years, *Rowan Magazine*, faced many obstacles. A former vice president for advancement redirected the content to highlight fundraising efforts and institutional pat-on-the-back achievements. This lack of consideration for the readers’ interests caused magazine-generated donations and readership to severely decrease. Also, as state funding has decreased, the University has been forced to tighten its budget. Increased enrollment and high-profile University initiatives have created more work for the University Relations staff, making it harder and harder to consistently produce magazines. In 2014 alone, the Office of University Publications managed more than 700 print projects and 200 photo projects, including *Rowan Magazine*, with 4.5 staff members.

New leadership has redirected the University’s goals. The magazine’s content is back to feature stories about alumni, Rowan pride and noteworthy University news. Readers have returned and positive feedback has increased. Through *Rowan Magazine*, Rowan University regularly engages alumni, University friends and corporate partners and provides a vehicle for open, two-way communication.

Research

As mentioned above, Rowan University hired a consultant to evaluate what it would take for the University Relations staff to produce two to three alumni magazines per year. Rachel Morton Associates evaluated the 20-year history of *Rowan Magazine* finding that it “had an auspicious beginning and set expectations among the readers that a lively and journalistically strong magazine would be for arriving regularly to inform them about the university.” As seen over time, the consultant described the magazine’s downfalls as “diminished frequency, reduced size and less ambitious content.” Rachel Morton Associates suggested best practices for alumni magazines; explained potential problems with Rowan’s staffing and resources and suggested solutions; listed alumni magazine staffing and resource comparisons for Rowan’s peer institutions; and budgeted the items necessary to create a strong magazine.

The University also conducted a readership study in 2010 right after it implemented significant content changes. Survey results showed that readers had a strong aversion to the new focus on fundraising and administrative news. They wanted the magazine to reflect the population—current students, alumni and University achievements. Donations significantly dropped. Letters to the editor significantly decreased, leaving the magazine fewer than two letters to publish per issue. Class notes—short announcements about engagements, weddings, babies, job changes, professional achievements, etc. submitted by alumni—decreased as readership decreased.

Planning

To produce a 64-page plus cover, full-color, 10 5/8” by 8 1/8” magazine for 91,000 plus readers, the editorial team starts with a topic discussion meeting approximately three and a half months before the delivery date. The University Relations vice president and assistant vice president finalize the list and make writing, art and design assignments.

Two editors, eight to 12 contributing writers (sometimes guest alumni writers or freelancers) depending on the issue and three designers create the magazine.

Goal: Maintain and build relationships with our constituents and develop relationships with leaders in business, education and other areas while instilling University pride.

Objective: Publish at least two *Rowan Magazines* per year.

Target Audiences: 80,000+ Rowan University alumni, parents of current students, donors and friends of the University, corporate and foundation partners, New Jersey elected officials, and tri-state college and university presidents.

Strategies:

- Share alumni success stories
- Highlight student achievement
- Thank donors
- Provide updates on University growth
- Generate revenue through paid advertisements to provide for special features in the magazine

Budget: The University allows about \$45,000 for printing, \$18,000 for postage and \$10,000 for freelancers (editing and photography). If University Advancement or Alumni include a donation envelope or event registration form, they bear the costs, typically about \$8,000 for a full run of the issue. In terms of paid staff time, the magazine is about 25 percent of the design team's regular work.

Execution & Tactics

To complete the magazine, the designers take the approved content and create rough layouts of each page (article, feature, advertisement, etc.). These roughs are sent back to the subject/client/writer for approval. After final edits and a final review of a high-resolution proof, the magazine goes to print and then the mail house for distribution.

The University Relations staff constantly looks for interesting alumni stories to feature in the magazine. Some of these stories are generated from University Advancement or College deans still in contact with the alumnus. Others were submitted as tips or leads from current students or other alumni. These same groups also make recommendations on current student stories.

Significant donations are acknowledged with cover or feature stories. Other donors can be found in the annual honor roll listings.

Information about the University's growth is written by the Office of Media & Public Relations and included in the magazine's news section.

The magazine also includes full and partial-page advertisements with prices that vary for internal (Rowan colleges, department and events) and external (local businesses) advertisers. The revenue from these ads resides in an account held by the University Foundation that disburses funds when the magazine needs budget supplements for special projects (e.g., false covers or additional pages to announce late-breaking news like major gifts).

Evaluation & Results

Since the leadership changes and a refocus on interesting content in 2011, readership, letters to the editor and class notes have all increased. Alumni engagement and donations have increased as seen by the University's growing endowment and record-breaking attendance at the 2014 Homecoming celebration—a more than 213 percent increase in attendance.

Now that the University has implemented a consistent schedule for the magazine, it will conduct another readership survey next year. Until the survey results provide more scientific information and direction, anecdotal evidence of the magazine's success abounds in readers' compliments offered in person, via phone and e-mail. Many alumni who hold graduate degrees from other institutions comment that Rowan's magazine is the best of what they receive, often as compared with schools widely considered more prestigious than Rowan. One recent letter to the editor captured much of the sentiment of a supportive audience: "In this day and age when magazines are full of little substance and lots of fluff, your publication has gotten better and better."