

## 1. Grant Project Purpose

The purpose of the University of Findlay’s (UF) “Engaging Young Alumni Beyond Traditional Events” project was to create and pilot a webinar/video series to provide this young affinity group with practical, personal, and professional continuing education as well as re-engage this audience in the University’s culture of preparing individuals for meaningful lives and productive careers. UF intended to use financial support from NEAT to develop and disseminate a webinar/video series.

UF’s Alumni Association wanted this project to be transformational and assist with achieving two key long-term outcomes:

1. UF wanted its alumni to grow and thrive, both professionally and personally. The university strives to remain a supportive mentor to its young graduates as they become independent persons who embody the ideology of meaningful lives and productive careers; and
2. UF aspired for alumni to perceive it as an institution that maintains the same level of care for and investment in its alumni as it does for enrolled students. The university intends to be a good steward for this “graduate community” and assist young alumni with understanding that investment and engagement includes education, networking/mentoring, and service to others – as well as traditional philanthropic giving.

## 2. Scope of the Grant Project, The Alumni Relations-Related Research Topic Area Explored and the Constituency Group Involved

### *Alumni-Relations-Related Topic Explored*

UF’s Alumni Association’s data show that giving and engagement within its Generation Orange (GO!) affinity group (graduates remaining under the age of 35) lags in comparison to the older alumni demographic. The Alumni Association, therefore, must adapt and implement new programming to meet the interests and needs of this younger alumni base. Unfortunately, the challenge of engaging young alumni is not limited to UF, though. An article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* details other universities expressing concern about reaching this target audience, with barriers including different communication techniques, new motivations for giving money/time, and even disconnection from the college life experience. Colleges and universities nationwide are piloting projects beyond traditional reunions and annual-giving appeals to keep these recent graduates engaged and excited about their alma mater (Masterson, 2017).

UF’s pilot project aligns with the intent of other higher education institutions to invest in creative programming that adequately connects with the needs and interests of recent graduates. UF’s project, therefore, was a series of webinars/videos to communicate with the GO! affinity group. This project intended to provide the Alumni Association a platform through which it could build fruitful relationships centered on:

- trust that the university wants the best for alumni;
- an understanding that educational investment continues after commencement;
- and giving back does not always equate to money, especially when graduates are transitioning into a new phase of life.

### *The Constituency Served*

The University's alumni base exceeds 29,000 living individuals in the United States, with an additional 1,500 alumni living worldwide. Nearly 68% of these alumni remain in Ohio after graduation, but alumni currently reside in all 50 states. UF's Alumni Association consists of all graduates, and there are no fees, dues, or subscriptions required to remain a lifelong member of the Association. The Association connects with its growing and extensive alumni base via social media; a monthly e-newsletter; semi-annual *FindlayMag*; continuing education programming; and traditional events such as dinners in cities across the nation, pre-game meetups at athletic contests, breakfast presentations on campus, and lifelong learning conferences.

UF's Alumni Association includes several affinity groups, including Generation Orange (GO!), the Marathon Petroleum Corporation UF Alumni Chapter, the Alumni Board of Governors, and the Athletic Hall of Fame. GO! is the fastest growing of these affinity groups in UF's Alumni Association because it includes graduates aged 35 years and younger.

UF's GO! affinity group includes nearly 8,000 alumni. The total number of Ohio-based GO! members is 4,734, and 97% of these individuals are within a two-hour drive of UF's campus. What is notable about this statistic is that even though a majority of alumni are in close proximity to most events/programming hosted by UF, their level of participation and engagement is lacking. UF needs to implement a different strategy to connect with this target audience in the short-term to move them along as engaged participants for the long term. The Alumni Association believes that, based upon previously collected survey and focus group data, this webinar/video series is the appropriate direction and desired tool that its young alumni are seeking at this time.

### *Scope of Project*

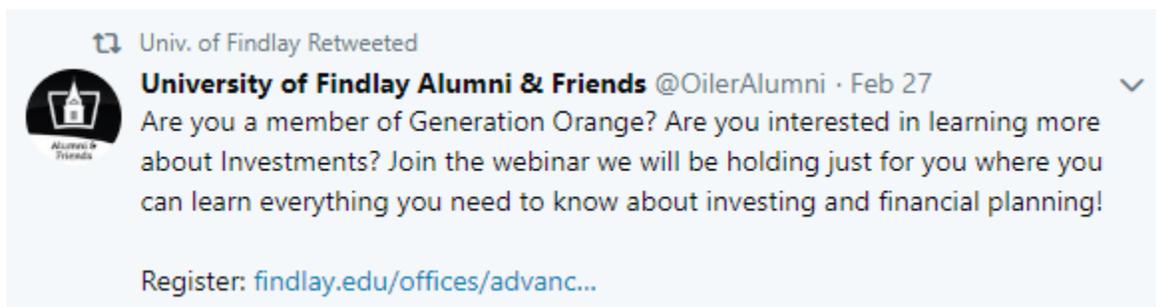
UF instituted a webinar/video series for GO!, consisting of two main webinars and three video productions featuring alumni. This project also fostered discussions on how UF's Alumni Association could measure the effectiveness of this new engagement tool/strategy on young alumni participation. This measurable outcome data may prove beneficial for the higher education field as a webinar/video series is cost effective, replicable, and scalable for most colleges and universities.

## **3. Implementation and Timeline**

September-October 2018: Survey developed and disseminated to UF's GO! membership to determine topics of greatest interest. Survey managed by the Alumni Association's Assistant Director.

September-December 2018: Communication exchanges between the Alumni Association and senior management regarding the presenters for the webinars.

January-May 2019: Marketing materials developed by UF's Department of Marketing and Communication to promote the webinar and spotlight videos. Materials included three emails and five social media posts on UF's Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter accounts.





The spotlight videos were each promoted through an email. The first of three videos was promoted on April 11, 2019 to 5,405 individuals. The open rate on this email was 11.7%, but the click rate was only 1.1%. The greatest number of clicks went directly to UF's YouTube page where the spotlight videos are stored. The third spotlight video was promoted similarly. This email experienced a 11.9% open rate, but only had a .7% click rate to the actual video.

January-February 2019: Confirmed webinar speaker and ran several test webinars to ensure that technology was okay and the presenter felt comfortable.

March 2019: Hosted a free, live webinar (using Zoom) focusing on investments. Webinar featured Tony Hixon, CIMA®, RFC®, who is the co-founder, Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Compliance Officer of Hixon Zuercher Capital Management based in Findlay, Ohio. Mr. Hixon's expertise includes financial advising, accounting, and tax planning. He is a member of the Board of Directors for the Findlay Family YMCA and a member of the University of Findlay's College of Business Advisory Board and Business Affiliates Scholarship Board.

Sixty-two (62) individuals registered to view the live webinar, but only 15 attended. A follow-up email was sent to registered individuals who did and did not attend, but again only a handful of individuals responded to the survey.



# INVESTING 101

UNIVERSITY OF FINDLAY GENERATION ORANGE

MARCH 11, 2019

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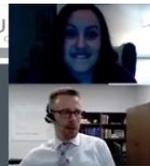
## FINAL TIP

- Let time and compounding work for you

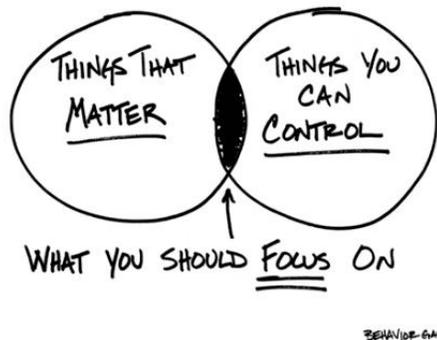
**Karen**  
 Starting age: 20  
 Investment amount: \$5,000  
 Number of years: 5  
 Total investment: \$25,000

**John**  
 Starting age: 25  
 Investment amount: \$5,000  
 Number of years: 10  
 Total investment: \$50,000

**Tom**  
 Starting age: 35  
 Investment amount: \$5,000  
 Number of years: 31  
 Total investment: \$155,000



## THANK YOU!



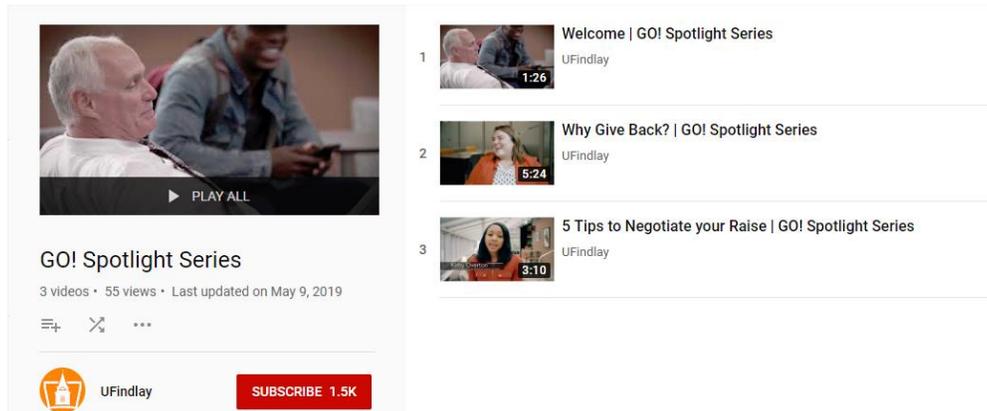
### Questions? Get in touch...

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Subscribe to Tony's email list to receive market updates and invitations to our webinars at [www.hzcapital.com](http://www.hzcapital.com)

March-May 2019: Coordinated and record three GO! spotlight videos. The three videos featured UF alumni Raeceen Dukehart '14, Kirstie Ernst '13, and Kirby Overton '06, '08, '18. These videos are now stored on UF's YouTube page. Each video was pre-recorded and edited by professional videographers in UF's Department of Marketing and Communication. The concept for the spotlight videos was to keep young alums connected with UF by pushing relevant and interesting content out to them in a unique and creative way. This will provide consistent engagement with young alums while giving updates on fellow GO! members as well as the campus community. Ideas floated for the videos included:

- Where are they now?
- Did you know?
  - Current job - why you love it, how UF helped you get there
  - Brief educational moment: APR: What is it? Why it's important and how young alums can help with even \$5.
  - Brief description of donor dollars vs. tuition dollars (i.e., what they pay for)
  - End by briefly sharing your story, how UF has impacted you and encourage others to get re-connected
- Campus Musings
- From the President's Desk (Dr. Fell connecting with GO! community, sharing what's new on campus, personal story, something funny)



May 2019: Analyze outcomes associated with webinar videos and determine their effectiveness for future programming.

#### 4. Grant Funding Expenses

Due to unanticipated challenges associated with producing webinars, discussed in more detail in the following sections, grant money was not expended as much as proposed. Much of the expenses for this project were provided in-kind by UF, such as salary and fringe for all involved personnel as well as expenses related to webinar technology, survey development, video dissemination, and video production. Therefore, funds were spent as follow:

- Webinar Honorarium: \$250.00
- Mileage for GO! Alumni to Film Spotlight Videos: \$162.00

## 5. Brief Summary of Findings

Alumni associations may assume, like the University of Findlay once did, that putting together a couple webinars is easier than trying to coordinate face-to-face events such as panels or alumni gatherings. However, our experience through this project proved that webinars take as much effort to produce as do these more traditional events. This awareness developed during the early planning process as the Alumni Association worked with University Advancement to ensure that webinar speakers and topics fulfilled many institutional goals. In similarity to other universities, the end goal for all institutional efforts is to move strategic priorities forward and to consistently engage individuals who are capable of leading the institution well into the future and/or offering their expertise and resources as legacies for others. UF holds this vision, too. As such, finding the perfect webinar speakers and topics proved more challenging and time consuming than expected.

Several fantastic presenters were identified for two different webinars, one to be held in the fall 2018 and one in spring 2019. Unfortunately, some of the presenters could not align their schedules to the timeline of this project while others withdrew from the process once they acknowledged their inability to have material recorded and disseminated outside of a live webinar. UF, therefore, due to timing and the ability to secure a speaker, was only able to complete one of the two live webinars.

Tony Hixon's presentation was very well received by those in attendance. Feedback suggested that the investment topic was popular among this targeted demographic and provided content that went above and beyond the traditional material presented through blogs and other resources. Being a Dave Ramsey follower, Tony presented several of the steps within Dave Ramsey's process to capture the audience's attention.

As for the small number of live attendees, UF is still trying to decode the reasons for this participation rate. UF believes that since the webinar was free, individuals may have associated it with a lack of value or something they could watch if available/be ready to pass on should other activities occur at the same time. Several individuals may also have equated a free webinar with one that would be readily accessible after the event so they did not attend in real time. Regardless, the fact that the webinar was free could have negatively impacted the depth and breadth of viewer participation.

While the live webinar proved the most challenging aspect of this project, the spotlight videos were easier, albeit still time consuming, to complete. The Alumni Association believes these three videos were a "really awesome touch" to the project, because they were easier to pull together and required less preparation and follow through time. The Alumni Association would like to develop even more of these videos but still struggles to identify the best presenters related to the GO! membership and are approved by UF leadership. One of the most important aspects of the spotlight videos was having professionals available to record and edit the videos. Without UF's Department of Marketing and Communication offering this valuable assistance, the quality of the videos would have been lacking, which would ultimately reduce the number of viewers and/or negatively impact their perception of the university.

The ideal method of promoting these webinars and videos would have been to send postcards to GO! members alerting them of the upcoming release dates several months in advance. This postcard would then be supplemented by the marketing strategies UF discussed earlier in this project. However, since the webinars were not approved far enough in advance, the postcard

became an ineligible marketing prospect. UF, hence, relied solely on social media and email advertising, which reduces the overall number of individuals receiving the notifications and planning ahead for their participation.

## **6. Brief Summary of Conclusions**

The webinar and spotlight video concept is a plausible means of engaging with young alumni, but several considerations should be made before proceeding with this strategy. First, UF recommends forgoing live webinars to focus exclusively on recorded videos and webinars that can be steadily released over the course of the academic year. One of the supporting reasons for this recommendation relates to the amount of time it takes to prepare for live videos, such as gaining familiarity with the recording technology for both the university and the speaker, practicing the webinar, and ensuring that presenter responses to questions align with the values and mission of the institution. UF's Alumni Association recommends producing webinars and videos over the summer and then releasing them on a specific timeline during the rest of the year. In this case, though, ample time for planning webinar topics and presenters must occur at least one year in advance of production.

A second recommendation relates to having well-developed internal processes regarding approval for selecting presenters and topics. Since approval processes can take time in larger institutions, pre-planning at least six months to one year in advance is critical. Furthermore, awareness of the leadership required to approve of these productions must also be well documented and communicated to ensure that project activities can stay on time.

A final recommendation is to pre-record videos and webinars so technology issues and other content can be edited before distribution. We always hope that technology works the way we want it to exactly when it should, but that is not always the case. To prevent unintentional challenges, therefore, productions should also be recorded and edited before sending to the broader population.

## **7. Brief Summary of Project Impacts on UF's Alumni Association Programming**

Moving forward, UF's Alumni Association will continue to determine which topics are of greatest interest to the GO! membership to try and build out additional webinars and videos for their viewing. The Alumni Association will need to strategically integrate these topics with the strategic direction of the institution to obtain the greatest impact from these efforts. In addition, the Alumni Association will need to carefully plan the timing and release of pre-recorded webinars and videos so they fit in with all of the other traditional activities produced for alumni. There is certainly a way to make this type of project seamlessly integrate into ongoing alumni relations, and UF's Alumni Association is taking the steps necessary to make the webinars and videos a positive and enlightening experience for alumni.