



## It's about who you've known

***Web-based alumni networks are helping oil and gas companies maintain their most valuable asset — experienced employees.***

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A number of oil and gas companies are retaining the collective experience of their pool of former employees. Using an alumni online network can add real value to a company's ability to find experienced employees for a variety of projects and job roles. From consulting to mentoring and training, the age gap is being bridged through a flexible and accessible Web-based interface.

AlumniInTouch.com provides more than just job postings. It links former, more experienced employees with the oil and gas industry's newest breed in a variety of roles to strengthen their ability to learn a rapidly growing business. Additionally, the online portal helps retired individuals keep close ties with their friends and with new developments in technology. The network is proving that retirement doesn't have to be permanent and the "great crew change" may not happen as abruptly as we think.

According to Cathy Clonts, president, Alumni Web Services (AWS), "Existing talent is still there in older members. By developing an online alumni community, companies can recruit these former employees for special projects. It's not only for recruitment; this is also about retention." Clonts also pointed out that, "These are not just 'retirees.'

Many of the companies using such networks have access to employees who were lost due to job sheds throughout the 1990s." Clonts added, "About 80% of alumni members are active professionals between the ages of 35 and 55, with actual retirees — many of whom have embarked on their second career — representing about 15% of the total." Online alumni networks re-introduce employees who have already established a relationship with the company at some point in the past. This often creates a bridge for these individuals to sign up for projects on a temporary basis with flexible conditions built in through the negotiating process.

This type of network is more than just a "worker" database. It also provides other benefits for members such as maintaining friendships and giving individuals an opportunity to perform other duties with employers where a need may be present.

### **Diversity and opportunity**

The AlumniInTouch portal hosts a number of oil and gas industry former-employee networking communities. These communities enable individuals to indicate their interests in training new recruits, coaching and mentoring, doing technical work, and sharing knowledge.

The network provides a ready and accessible pool of seasoned industry professionals who are willing to support the hiring and retaining of young talent to ease their entry into the industry. "Participants and employers find the networking communities an excellent way to connect for job networking," Clonts said.

### **Flexibility**

Alumni members also benefit by indicating their availability for short-term and permanent opportunities in consulting and project work, or for training and mentoring.

Employers can search the database of available participants or post opportunities on the Web site. Additionally, alumni can preset time off during a term of work based on the negotiation of each project. The ability to coordinate their part-time work to fit within their personal plans adds value to the service for both parties.

In addition to time specifications, alumni members can usually work remotely on some projects. The ability to re-enter the workforce without being tied to "the office" is also an encouraging factor for many members.

### **Staying active**

Alumni networks are also populated by employees who want to maintain an intellectual relationship with the industry. Many individuals are financially secure but find that the stimulation offered by returning to the industry is extremely rewarding.

### **What comes next?**

The Alumni In Touch online portal was developed in 1999. Since then, many oil and gas companies have realized the benefits of maintaining an active relationship with their former employees. Innovative recruiting, flexible work opportunities, and mentoring programs will clearly play a role in meeting future business needs. New social networking communities are a creative way to tap these opportunities and provide the edge to effectively prepare incoming engineering and oil and gas recruits for the realities of the industry, meet their training and development needs, cut down on attrition rates, and contribute to greater workplace equity through intergenerational understanding.

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