

How Alumni UMH Uses a Radio Podcast to Increase Internal and External Engagement

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[Keywords](#)

[Abstract](#)

[1. Background](#)

[1.1. About the Miguel Hernández University of Elche \(UMH\)](#)

[1.2. About Alumni UMH](#)

[2. Objectives of the radio podcast](#)

[3. Radio UMH](#)

[3.1. Presentation](#)

[3.2. Alumni UMH at Radio UMH](#)

[4. Design of the radio show and planification for the season](#)

[4.1. Design of the radio podcast](#)

[4.2. Selection of topics](#)

[4.3. Selection of collaborators](#)

[5. Development of a typical radio show](#)

[5.1. Pre-show](#)

[5.2. Live broadcast of the show](#)

[5.3. Post-show](#)

[6. Outcomes and impact](#)

[7. Conclusion](#)

Keywords

internal engagement, external engagement, internal communication, external communication, professional collaboration, radio podcast

Abstract

This article shares the experience of Alumni UMH in the production of a radio podcast made by and for members of Alumni UMH that achieve objectives of internal and external engagement, internal and external communication, and receive professional collaboration from Alumni UMH members.

The different aspects from the design of the radio podcast and planning the season, the development of a typical radio show, and the outcomes and impact attained are shared.

1. Background

1.1. About the Miguel Hernández University of Elche (UMH)

Teaching activities at the Miguel Hernández University of Elche began in the fall of 1997. The UMH, whose main campus is located in the city of Elche, operates 4 campuses in all: Altea, Elche, Orihuela, and Sant Joan d'Alacant. Its campuses extend over almost 95 hectares, there are 75 university buildings, and constructed areas cover about 210,000 m². Currently, the UMH is home to 25,247 students, of which 13,002 are enrolled in official degree programs (bachelor, master, PhD), with the remaining 12,245 learning in continuing education programs. The Miguel Hernández University has 7 faculties (Faculty of Experimental Sciences, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Social and Legal Sciences of Elche, and Faculty of Social and Legal Sciences of Orihuela) and 2 schools (School of Engineering of Elche and School of Engineering of Orihuela).

Regarding academics, the Miguel Hernández University of Elche offers 28 bachelor's, 50 master's, and 13 doctoral programs. In addition to these official programs, the UMH also offers hundreds of its own continuing education courses and programs, including University Expert, unique UMH Masters, Advanced University Diploma, University Specialist, Summer, Winter, Refinement, Bridging, University Admission Preparation, and language instruction, among others.

Average research resources committed to the UMH (research income) over the past five years have been 9,800,667 €, and our position in the 2015 U-Ranking of Spanish Universities in terms of productivity is fourth overall. The Miguel Hernández University of Elche occupies sixth position in the ranking of annual scientific production (publications per faculty member in 2016) among Spanish universities (Observatorio IUNE).

The UMH occupies the fifth position in the ISSUE Ranking for Teaching, Research, and Innovation and Technological Development (U-Ranking 2017) among Spanish universities (Fundación BBVA-Ivie). The total number of journal publications in 2017 (papers, books, chapters, abstracts, documents) was 1,263.

To consolidate international presence and projection, the Miguel Hernández University of Elche maintains 593 agreements with foreign universities, 360 with Spanish universities, and 16 agreements for joint degree programs with universities outside Spain.

As for mobility, the UMH helped send off 281 outgoing students to learn elsewhere during the 2017/2018 academic year while it welcomed 290 incoming students into its classrooms.

1.2. About Alumni UMH

Alumni UMH was launched in 2013 with the basic purpose of fostering interaction between the university and its graduates to strengthen links between both, which is broken down into the following main objectives:

- A) Promote academic, social, and personal links between UMH graduates and the other groups at the university.
- B) Support activities of different services and administrative units that are directed at the Alumni UMH body.
- C) Collaborate in the dissemination of cultural, leisure, athletic, and academic activities in addition to any other type of activity organized by the UMH.

D) Publicize the image of the UMH in social and economic settings and, especially, at businesses, entities, and institutions where graduates are present and advancing their careers.

E) Engage in any activity that strengthens links between the university and the society it serves, with special attention towards UMH graduates.

The philosophy of Alumni UMH focuses on making graduates continue feeling like an integral part of their university, employing messages for this such as “You continue forming part of the UMH,” “Our doors are always open for you,” “You are Alumni UMH,” etc.

The Alumni UMH model possesses the following characteristics:

- It is constituted as an administrative service that is part of the university and directed at its graduates.
- There are no fees for this service and it requires registration as a member.
- Not only can graduates of official university programs (bachelor, master, and PhD) be members of Alumni UMH, but graduates of UMH continuing education programs and other educational programs at least 200 hours in length may also join.
- Joining Alumni UMH affords members access, under the same conditions the rest of the university community enjoys, to athletic installations, training & language courses, libraries, and members may collaborate in environmental volunteerism and development cooperation programs, among other advantages.

Some of the main outcomes of Alumni UMH include:

- There are more than 14,700 members of Alumni UMH, and this number represents about 40% of all UMH graduates since the university was founded. Since Alumni UMH was launched, the percentage of university students who have graduated and joined increases to 73%. As for graduates of master’s programs, 47% have become members.
- More than 1700 collaborations with the UMH by members of Alumni UMH.
- More than 1100 different people have collaborated (some have done so several times).
- More than 260 interviews with members of Alumni UMH, including written interviews and the radio podcasts.
- 102 videos by members of Alumni UMH, including those received by graduates (79) and those produced by Alumni UMH (23).
- More than 300 presentations by members of Alumni UMH at employment workshops.

2. Objectives of the radio podcast

The launch of the radio podcast took place the same year as the birth of Alumni UMH because fulfilling the primary objective of making graduates feel engaged with their university is considered important.

There are three specific objectives sought with this radio podcast:

1. Increase internal and external engagement.
2. Support internal and external communication.
3. Obtain professional collaboration from Alumni UMH member graduates of journalism.

3. Radio UMH

3.1. Presentation

Miguel Hernández University of Elche Radio (Radio UMH) began broadcasting on October 15, 2007. Its inaugural program was Informativos UMH (UMH News), a space for university news that addressed the institution's most important topics. This program was hosted by the then students of journalism (and now members of Alumni UMH) Carolina Pascual, Ana Fajardo, and Carolina Galipienso.

During its first season on air, 31 programs were broadcast. Today, almost 12 years later, and following more than 100,000 continuous hours on air, some 1,500 people (students, staff, faculty, and Alumni UMH) participate in 101 self-produced slots. The topics and formats of Radio UMH are as diverse and pluralistic as the very members of the university community.

This own channel of communication, public, and not-for-profit at the Miguel Hernández University of Elche broadcasts 24 hours a day. It was created mainly to provide a voice to university community members, strengthen the practical training of its students, and facilitate scientific dissemination to promote stronger links and social cohesion between the university community and the society it is a part of.

In this sense, Radio UMH is configured as an excellent communication tool that makes it possible for university efforts to reach beyond the university's physical limits through its programming, means, mechanisms, and strategies in order to show the public this public institution's ongoing work. It is also a formidable channel for disseminating science in addition to academic, cultural, and athletic activities held at the UMH and localities where this institution is present.

Moreover, the university station also informs about and debates everything that is happening within its immediate surroundings. This it does because the radio serves as a meeting point for dialog, reflection, and to promote values such as pluralistic thinking, respect, and tolerance with the purpose of making significant contributions to social, cultural, economic, and technological development in our society and the comprehensive education of the university community.

Similarly, and due to the very nature of our institution, Radio UMH also acts as an important teaching instrument designed to enhance the practical preparation of, for example, undergraduate students of journalism, audiovisual communication, and telecommunications technology engineering. This is possible because the university station is configured as a platform through which training and communications activities can be carried out for the university community that result in students gaining communication competencies and skills. In line with this, Radio UMH has promoted a pioneering educational innovation project that enables students who do radio to be tutored by radio professionals so these students improve their communication skills.

The university radio has seven studios: 4 in Elche, 1 in Sant Joan d'Alacant, 1 in Orihuela, and 1 in Altea.

Radio UMH forms part of the Spanish Association of University Radio (ARU), it participates in radio journalism projects, such as ARU News and Euroconnection, and it has been the recipient of several honors and awards.

3.2. Alumni UMH at Radio UMH

One of the benefits of becoming a member of Alumni UMH is the possibility it affords of hosting a Radio UMH program. Since the birth of Alumni UMH, the number of members who have hosted their own program has grown, as can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Radio programs hosted by members of Alumni UMH and total number of Alumni UMH participating per academic year.

Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Programs	4	8	12	21	22	29
Members	4	8	13	24	33	41

It is also becoming more common for other Radio UMH programs to invite members of Alumni UMH as guests on them as experts or to talk about their experiences.

4. Design of the radio show and planification for the season

4.1. Design of the radio podcast

The radio podcast design contemplated the need to fulfill the objective of providing a voice to the very graduates who participate in the podcast. Because of this, the most important part of the podcast is dedicated to talking to them and hearing about their experiences.

Radio podcasts last for one hour (except for one season in which they were half an hour) and they are broadcast live. The current season is its fifth (during 2017/18 there were none).

4.2. Selection of topics

Generally, each podcast addresses one UMH undergraduate program, but occasionally, there are special podcasts that speak of entrepreneurship with participation by graduates who have become entrepreneurs, podcasts dedicated to graduates who have participated in the Erasmus program, and podcasts dedicated to volunteerism in Rwanda.

The undergraduate programs that a radio podcast will address are chosen at the beginning of each season, and covering all programs and faculties and schools is kept in mind.

4.3. Selection of collaborators

One of the radio podcast objectives to fulfill was obtaining professional collaboration from members of Alumni UMH. To meet this objective, an editorial team is selected prior to the start of the season, and all journalism Alumni UMH members are asked to collaborate as a part of it.

Some of them have been collaborating for more than one season, and there has always been a team of about five members to help with show contents (interviews and sound recordings with alumni stories) and live broadcast.

This is a very important manner of collaboration with Alumni UMH, since deep bonds are forged with members of Alumni UMH who participate during an entire season

5. Development of a typical radio show

5.1. Pre-show

During the pre-show, a questionnaire is sent to all Alumni UMH members of the corresponding undergraduate program to inquire about their college experiences (memories, anecdotes, and professors they remember fondly), as well as their current occupations and projects.

Using all received responses, the editorial team writes what are referred to as graduate histories, in which the responses to the questionnaire are summarized in a such a manner that sound recordings can be made that are later used during the radio podcast.

Also during the pre-show period, the graduates thought to be most interesting, along with one of the fondly remembered professors, are chosen to be interviewed during the live broadcast, and they are contacted to inquire about their availability for said interview.

On the day prior to each program, two types of emails are sent to inform them about the broadcast of the radio podcast: to all graduates who respond to the questionnaire and to all of the fondly remembered professors.

5.2. Live broadcast of the show

During the live broadcast, there are three different kinds of interviews:

1. The faculty dean interview addresses general aspects of the undergraduate program the corresponding radio podcast is dedicated to.
2. The selected graduates who respond to the questionnaire, usually 2 or 3, talk about their college experience as well as their current occupations and projects.
3. A fondly remembered professor is also interviewed. This interview emphasizes the impact the university has on its graduates, as well as highlighting the importance of expressing the affection graduates have for their university instructors.

During the live broadcast, tweets of images are also published on Twitter. Every participating Alumni UMH member receives an Alumni UMH mug.

5.3. Post-show

Once the show is finished, a blog post is written with the podcast on all UMH social networks. This post is also mailed to all participants, professors, and the faculty dean.

6. Outcomes and impact

The outcomes of this experience have been quite satisfactory and have affected several collectives:

- Journalists from the editorial team can feel significant for the university because they help produce a nice podcast (22 members have collaborated so far).
- Alumni UMH members are given the opportunity to respond to a request to help the university, which lets their voice be heard (more than 550 responses to the questionnaire and more than 100 live interviews with them).
- Faculty deans are able to talk about their undergraduate programs (49 podcasts so far).
- Fondly remembered professors receive positive feedback about their teaching efforts (almost 500 messages sent to 360 different professors).

- Staff from other university units (Employment Office, International Relations) are remembered by alumni.
- Current students can hear from former students (alumni) from their same program.
- Potential future students can use these podcasts during university visits at high schools and learn from alumni.

7. Conclusion

At Alumni UMH, it was clear from the beginning of the activity that a radio podcast would be interesting to meet some of the proposed objectives, and to accomplish this, the existence of a radio station at the university (Radio UMH) was taken advantage of to launch it.

This project achieves its objectives (even more so than was hoped for in the design phase), and it helps Alumni UMH reach some of its main goals. Analyzing the three starting objectives of the radio podcast:

1. Internal and external engagement: it seems clear that it helps to strengthen the link with different university collectives, both internal (deans, faculty members, staff) and external (members of Alumni UMH, and current and potential students).
2. Internal and external communication: the radio podcast is a good pretext for being better known both internally and externally.
3. Professional collaboration: the editorial team is a very meaningful way to ask for cooperation from members of Alumni UMH who studied journalism as undergraduates.

This experience shows that the creation of a radio podcast with these characteristics is very beneficial for some important objectives of Alumni UMH, although it is important not to lose sight that its production process is labor-intensive.

We think this can be implemented at other alumni offices, as it can be accomplished even without a radio station, and few resources are required. We are willing to help any other alumni service that wants to implement it.