



Case Study



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The Problem

The University of Michigan Athletics is ranked in the top ten best university athletic programs in the United States. With so many student and alumni athletes, the University of Michigan's Athletics Career Center is committed to the career development of all of their champions.

However, they found it difficult to empower students to network with alumni in a meaningful way. Student-athletes at the university spend a large amount of time practicing and traveling with their team and have a unique set of challenges. The University of Michigan's Athletics Career Center understood that the most meaningful way to ensure career development opportunities for their athletes was to create an online community of student and alumni athletes.

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Goals

Michigan decided on three primary goals:

1. Create intentional relationships between students and alumni that are grounded in a mutual connection, shared experience, and desire to strengthen the Wolverine community.
2. Turn these relationships into tangible career development outcomes for student-athletes by expanding their network and providing mentors to offer guidance.
3. Keep an enthusiastic, loyal, and dedicated alumni base meaningfully involved in the university community.

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Strategy

Athletics Career Center administration partnered with PeopleGrove to create the Wolverine Network, an online community for current and past student-athletes. Familiar with the intensity of life as a student-athlete, career center leadership wants their athletes to feel prepared entering the career world. They approached this in three steps:

Step 1: Take the pressure off

For many students, networking can seem overwhelming. By framing the platform as a way to build relationships with alumni-athletes who have a specific understanding of their lives, many student-athletes felt much more at ease. The pressure to impress and “land the job” is lifted, while students instead focus on fostering real relationships with alumni who can effectively advise them on navigating their major or transitioning from sports to the career world.

Step 2: Get the entire athletic community on board

The new athletic mentorship platform is not only useful for current student-athletes, but benefits the wider community. By educating coaches and parents about the new mentorship resources available (and therefore the investment in career outcomes for their students), the Wolverine Network has become a great advantage in recruiting new athletes. Michigan stands out as the only university in the U.S. with a specific student-athlete career program, and remains focused on continuing to innovate on student-athlete career success.

Step 3: Create opportunities for alumni to reconnect with their alma mater

The athletic career center ensures that their alumni feel supported by connecting campus sporting events with career services events. By bringing alumni back to Michigan for sports games or job fairs, Michigan alumni have the chance to personally benefit from networking with other alumni and employer partners while meeting current students. These in-person interactions foster a networking atmosphere that brings the Wolverine Network to life and a life-long appreciation for the school.



04 **Impact**

Although the Wolverine Network is still in early stages, one-third of their users have already sent a message to an alum and started the process of building relationships. Not only are students benefiting, but parents, coaches, and alumni are joining the platform to spread the power of mentorship to the entire Wolverine community. The athletic career center is filling a mentorship void that will now bring student and alumni athletes closer together, forming connections that directly lead to positive career outcomes.

05 **Key Learnings to Building a Robust Athletics Program**

- Creating a platform for a specific community can help the community bond on multiple levels
- A mentorship program adds value by offering new resources to students and reinforcing affinity among alumni
- Using all channels of contribution bolster the focus of career development and community