

# Guide to Using Google Alerts

If asking subject matter experts to volunteer content for the website leaves you worried that you are not capturing all the material that is available, consider using Google Alerts to electronically track particularly prolific faculty members. Google Alerts can also help identify external influencers that you should develop cross-linkages with (see Tool #8), inform competitive intelligence about program and brand perception (see Tool #1), and identify and track alumni and other donors.

However, if not designed carefully, Google Alerts can be cumbersome to manage, providing large volumes of information only marginally relevant to the institution's needs. The COE Forum has compiled the tips below to help members craft more tailored Alerts that yield actionable information for meeting COE website development and other recruiting and branding objectives.

## What is a Google Alert?

Google Alerts are regular email notifications of the most up-to-date web mentions of specified search terms. Google's bots (or "spiders") are constantly scraping the internet for new content to index in the search engine. Google Alerts allow users to directly benefit from these additions by notifying them as soon as the bots capture material that matches your pre-specified terms. Google Alerts are commonly used by individuals and organizations that want to stay apprised of their reputation, buzz in a relevant field, and/or competitors.

## How Can I Use Google Alerts?

Within the field of postsecondary education, Google Alerts are most commonly used by collegiate athletic recruiters to identify and monitor potential new recruits. However, Google Alerts can have further applications for continuing, professional, and online education units.

Potential Uses	Suggested Alert Search Terms	Possible Benefits
<b>Identify faculty-generated content for the website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty name + institution</li> </ul> <i>Tip: start with the highly influential/popular/prolific professors and expand from there</i>	Faculty members with large networks can be effective advocates of the institution and program
<b>Identify influencers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institution name</li> <li>Specific program name</li> <li>Institutional niche area</li> </ul> <i>Tip: add a non -.edu site specifier to eliminate results that are from your or other institutions</i>	Influencers can help identify trends in your field and can be an excellent target of marketing efforts due to their ability to amplify your message to their network
<b>Gather intelligence about program brand perception</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program name</li> <li>Influencers</li> <li>Field of interest</li> </ul>	This type of Google Alert can help detect perception surrounding your program and institution and provide information about target audiences or ideas for program modification
<b>Monitor peers and competitors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field of interest + competitors or solely competitors</li> </ul>	Peer and competitor offerings can help develop your own program's differentiating characteristics
<b>Track alumni and donors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institution name + alumni/graduate/degree from/etc.</li> </ul>	Alumni can be a valuable as advocates for your program, future customers, and resources for current students

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## How to Set Up Google Alerts

**Step 1.**  
Visit  
<http://google.com/alerts>

If applicable, sign into the appropriate Google account. A Google account is not necessary to receive Alerts; they can be delivered to any email address. A Google account does, however, give you access to some convenient alert management options and it also allows you the ability to receive alerts via RSS feed in addition to via email. If you anticipate receiving a large number of alerts, it may be wise to create a separate email address to hold them.

**Step 2.**  
Determine preferred keywords

A sound starting point is to set up alerts for the name of your organization, the names of key leadership and faculty members, and relevant keywords in your community. You will need to establish separate alerts for each search phrase; Google allows users to maintain up to 1,000 alerts. To understand the results that might be returned for any given search phrases, run an ordinary Google search with them.

**Step 3.**  
Choose an alert type

Google has six types of Alerts:

Type	Searches	Captures
<b>News</b>	News articles	Hits in the top ten results of a News search
<b>Blogs</b>	Blog posts	Hits in the top ten results of a Google Blog search
<b>Web</b>	Web pages	Hits in the top twenty results of a Google Web search
<b>Comprehensive</b>	News articles, blogs, web pages	Hits in the top ten results of any of the above
<b>Video</b>	Videos	Hits in the top ten results of a Google Video search
<b>Groups</b>	Google Groups	Hits in the top fifty results of a Google Groups search

**Step 4.**  
Decide the frequency with which you want to receive alerts

How often you select to receive an alert should depend on the expected volume of results and the time sensitivity of the topic being monitored. You can pick from three options:

- As-it-happens
- Once-a-day
- Once-a-week

Even with the as-it-happens options, alerts will only be delivered once Google indexes the content; the speed of reporting depends in large part on how well search engine optimized the referring website is. An infrequently updated website may take weeks to be “crawled” by Google’s bots.

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**Step 5.**  
**Determine the best search phrases**

Google offers the following tips for honing your search phrase<sup>1</sup>:

- Be as precise as possible. The more precise your search terms are, the more relevant your alerts will be.
- Use quotes around a group of words if you are looking for them together. *Examples: "White House"; "Mike Smith"*
- Put quotes around a single word to match that word precisely as you typed it, excluding synonyms and spelling variations. *Examples: "ford" (to not include results for Ford); Michael "Jackson" (to not include results for Michael Jackson)*
- Use a minus sign (-) in front of words that you want to exclude. *Examples: paris -texas ; apple -fruit*
- Use the site: operator to limit your search to specific sites. *Examples: physics site:.edu ; congress site:nytimes.com*
- Use the site: operator with a dash to exclude specific sites. *Example: "joe bloggs" -site:twitter.com*

## Implementation Tips<sup>2</sup>

- Expect to discard most findings—too many results are not helpful
- Establish a spreadsheet to track items as they are received. Record the date the item appeared, source, author, subject, comments, links, and trackbacks
- After one or two months, calculate the ratio of comments to posts (also known as the conversation index) for each eligible entry

1) <http://support.google.com/alerts/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=175927&topic=28416&ctx=topic>

2) adapted from *Measure what Matters* by Katie Delahaye Paine