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Promotion, Education, and Marketing of an Expanded VCU Bike Share Program

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Promotion, Education, and Marketing of an Expanded VCU Bike Share Program

TEAM MEMBERS

Kellie J. Archer, Professor, Department of Biostatistics

Tomasz Arodz, Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science

Alison Breland, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology

Thomas Klug, Associate Vice President of Marketing, University Relations

Project Sponsor: Erin Stanforth, Director of Sustainability, Facilities Management

PROJECT ABSTRACT

We propose to help promote, market, and provide education about an expanded bike share program at VCU. The goal of the bike share program is three-fold: 1) improve travel between campuses, 2) encourage alternate transportation to reduce traffic and parking difficulties and 3) be a "green" initiative on the VCU campus. The expanded bike share program will include additional bikes and bike stations, managed by an outside company. Recently, VCU's Office of Parking and Transportation has learned that they will be receiving funds for the program, and they are looking for assistance to promote, market, and provide education about the program. We will also explore additional aspects of a bike sharing program such as encouraging the use of helmets/safety issues, using technology to track bikes, and conducting a needs assessment to determine consumer demand and preferences.

QUEST FOR DISTINCTION

Theme IV: This project embraces Theme IV, to become a national model for community engagement and regional impact. VCU is a major research university located in the heart of Richmond, VA. The bike share program that we will promote and market will make a more flexible transportation system available that will provide the VCU community with a vibrant Richmond experience. The bike share program may increase students' ability to participate in community outreach experiences, service learning, practice, and internships (Theme IV Goals A & B). Additionally, the program is a green operation that will help reduce carbon emissions which is important for our quest to become climate neutral by 2050 (Theme IV Goal C).

The Monroe Park and Medical College of Virginia campuses are both geographically distinct and have distinctive academic foci. This program is connected to Theme III with respect to becoming a fully integrated university given that it promotes connections between the Monroe Park campus and MCV campus, which may help facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations (Theme III Goal B).

PROJECT GOALS

1. Promote, market, and provide education about an expanded bike share program at VCU.
2. Develop recommendations for promoting safety.
3. Develop recommendations for assessing consumer demand and preferences.

PROJECT STRATEGIES

Our team met with key stakeholders, reviewed historical data, investigated bike share programs at other universities and in other metropolitan areas, and developed a marketing approach.

ACTION STEPS

- Promote through new VCU RamBikes website
- Promote with promotional video online at RamBikes website and VCU homepage
- Advertise in the Commonwealth Times

- Advertise through posters
- Advertise through placards on VCU RamRide
- Publish information about the expanded bike share program in the Stall Seat Journal.
- Distribute informational brochures during student orientation, Welcome Week, VCU housing fairs, etc.
- Distribute t-shirts upon signing up for the expanded RamBikes program.
- Promotional t-shirts for incentivizing riders
- In conjunction with VCU Police, develop cycling safety guidelines to appear on the RamBikes webpage and informational brochures
- Hold a helmet design competition; winning design would be used for free bike helmets distributed to RamBikes subscribers
- Hold a bike-a-thon, bike parade, or bike rally to encourage use
- Develop mobile apps to encourage RamBikes use

OUTCOMES

We have developed a logo, posters, short video, and drafted promotional materials that could be used for advertising the expanded bike share program. We have also developed a survey that Parking & Transportation could distribute to gather data pertaining to the frequency of bike use for campus travel; factors that prevent riding a bike or riding a bike more often; familiarity with the RamBikes program; likelihood of using an expanded RamBikes program; acceptable fee structure; and desired locations for bike rack placement. Recommendations include a re-assessment one year post-implementation for assessing the effectiveness of the promotional campaign.

SUSTAINABILITY

Key stakeholders include Parking and Transportation, the Office of Sustainability in Facilities Management, and the Outdoor Adventure Program in VCU Recreational Sports.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES

The MAP-21 grant from Virginia Department of Transportation through the Federal Highway Administration should cover the initial implementation of the expanded bike share program. Ongoing maintenance of bikes would be provided by an external vendor (an example is UBikes) with the budget being assumed by the Office of Sustainability. Additional costs for the promotional materials are itemized.

Project Budget

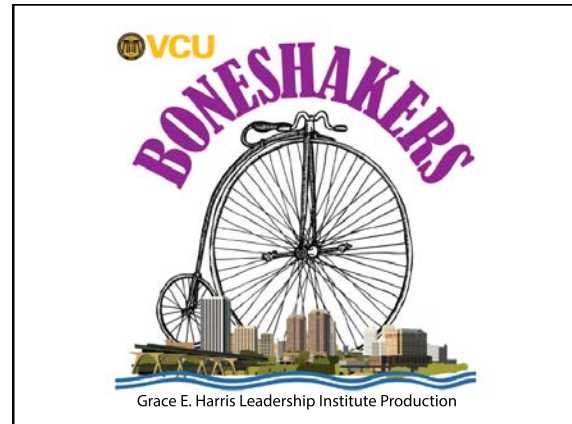
	<u>Item Description</u>	<u>Justification</u>	<u>Cost</u>
1.	Marketing Campaign	Creative development, and media and print production (advertise the expanded RamBikes program by developing posters, placards, brochures, and short video segments for on-campus advertisement)	\$9,500 - \$12,500
2.	T-shirts	Distribute t-shirts with developed expanded bike share logo to subscribers and for promotional contests (100 t-shirts @ \$10 each)	\$1,000
3.	Helmets	Distribute helmets to first 100 subscribers (100 helmets @ \$20 each)	\$2,000
		Total	\$12,500 – \$15,500

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Obtain survey results from VCU students, and use the results in the development of a plan for RamBikes pricing and rack locations.
2. Develop a marketing plan, based on the proposed ideas from our team. Then implement the marketing plan at the same time that the new RamBikes program is rolled out. We recommend that, from a promotional standpoint, providing free rentals in an initial period would help generate interest in the program.
3. Develop an education/safety plan, based on the proposed ideas from our team. Implement the education/safety plan at the same time that the new RamBikes program is rolled out. Consider measuring safety annually, using the suggested measures.
4. Depending on the marketing strategies used, the cost could range from \$12,500 to \$15,500.
5. Barriers to project success include finding funding for the proposed marketing plan, as well as students not being aware of the new program, and thus not using it maximally.

FINAL PITCH

Our proposal to promote, market, and provide education about VCU's new expanded bike share program provides essential recommendations for the success of this program. Effectively marketing a program such as this one will be key to ensuring that students are aware of the program, and that they use the program maximally. If many students use the bike share program, this should help alleviate some of the transportation/parking issues at VCU, help join the campuses together, and potentially improve air quality. In addition, chances for expanding the program even more in the future is increased if the demand for this service is high.



Introductions

- The Boneshakers:
 - Alison Breland, Department of Psychology
 - Kellie Archer, Department of Biostatistics
 - Tom Arodz, Department of Computer Science
 - Tom Klug, University Relations
- Sponsor:
 - Erin Stanforth, Office of Sustainability



Goals

- Improve travel between campuses
- Encourage alternate transportation to reduce traffic and parking difficulties
- Be a "green" initiative on the VCU campus
- Align with and support Quest for Distinction



- Theme IV: Become a national model for community engagement and regional impact.
- Theme III: Achieve national recognition as a fully integrated research university with a commitment to human health.



Background

- Alternative transportation (biking and walking) has been gradually increasing nationwide.
- An increasing number of cities have goals to increase biking.
- Virginia ranks 31st on a list of states' bicycling and walking levels (low).



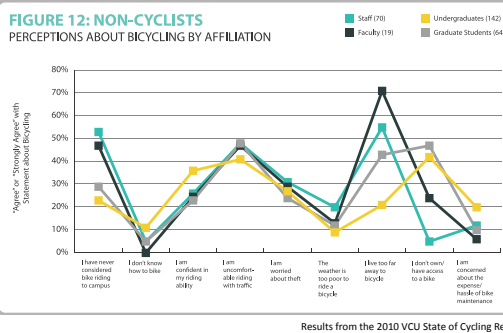
From: Bicycling and Walking in the United States, 2014 Benchmarking Report

Situation at VCU

- VCU has several transportation challenges:
 - Insufficient parking on city streets
 - More students/employees than parking spots in decks/lots
 - Two campuses, separated by ~1 mile
- A VCU bus system connects the campuses but does not operate 24/7; has limited stops; often runs at capacity.
- City buses connect the campuses but are not free for students.
- VCU currently has a small bike sharing program (RamBikes; launched in 2012) that has 12 bikes available for check out at our two libraries (but, access and capacity are limited).



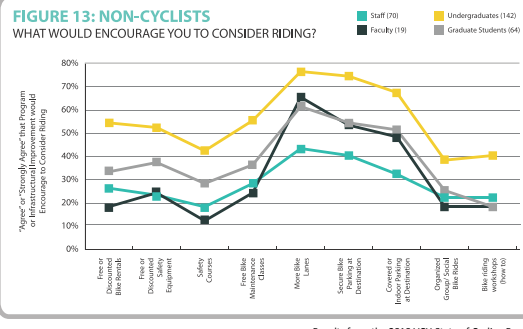
FIGURE 12: NON-CYCLISTS
PERCEPTIONS ABOUT BICYCLING BY AFFILIATION



Results from the 2010 VCU State of Cycling Report



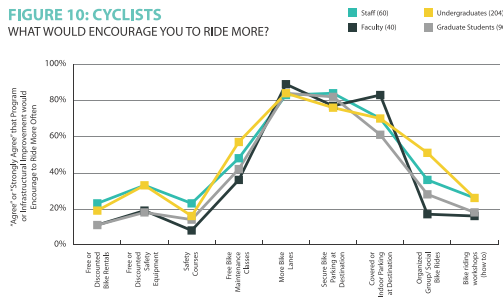
FIGURE 13: NON-CYCLISTS
WHAT WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONSIDER RIDING?



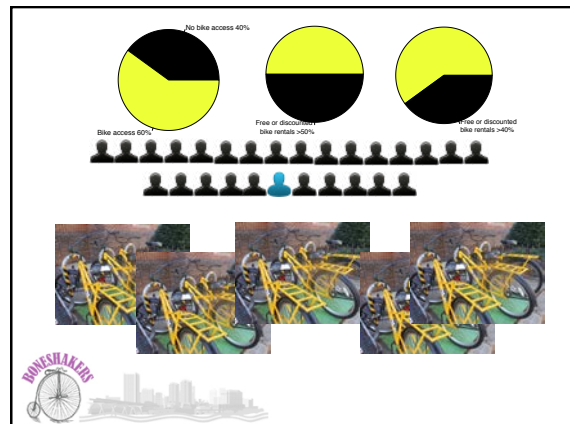
Results from the 2010 VCU State of Cycling Report



FIGURE 10: CYCLISTS
WHAT WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO RIDE MORE?



Results from the 2010 VCU State of Cycling Report



Modified survey development

- Frequency of bike use for campus travel
- Factors that prevent riding a bike or riding a bike more often
- Familiarity with the RamsBike program
- Likelihood of using an expanded RamsBike program
- Acceptable fee structure
- Desired locations for bike rack placement



Moving forward....

- VCU will receive a MAP-21 grant from the VDOT/Federal Highway Administration to purchase bikes, racks and replacement parts as part of the implementation of an expanded bike share program.
- An RFP will be issued to identify a vendor for the expanded RamsBikes program.



Example vendor: UBikes, How it Works

- Reserve a bike using the Social Bicycles mobile app or using a bike's keypad.
- Enter your 4-digit PIN to unlock the bike.
- Ride and return the bike at any hub station.
- Plans available:
 - \$3 per hour;
 - \$15 monthly (90 minutes free daily);
 - \$80 annually (90 minutes free daily);
 - \$1 per hour overage fee.



PROPOSAL



Marketing and awareness

To ensure the new RamsBikes program is successful, it's critical the program is properly marketed to:

- Create awareness
- Build excitement
- Communicate program benefits
- Provide "how-to" information



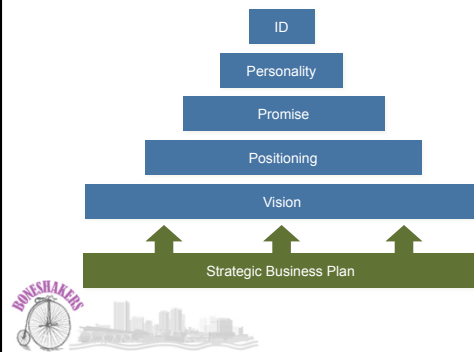
Marketing plan

Our plan is comprehensive yet simple. We're recommending these key components:

- Branding
- Marketing strategy
- Media plan
- Creative



Brand platform building blocks



Branding

Without a brand platform, marketing efforts can be inconsistent and lack strategic direction. We recommend developing the following assets:

- **Positioning statement**
 - How a brand positions itself in the competitive environment to ensure its target market can differentiate it from others and create preference
- **Brand promise**
 - Identifies what consumers should expect for all interactions with your people, products, services and organization



Positioning statement

Differentiate and positively position the institution among competitors



Brand positioning framework

To: Target market

Is an: Competitive reference

That: Point of difference

Because: Reasons to believe

So that: Benefit statement

Brand positioning statement

To: The VCU community (primarily students, secondarily faculty and staff)
RamBikes

Is a: Campus-based bike sharing service

That: Offers a convenient, healthy, inexpensive and environmentally friendly transportation alternative

Because: It has ample bikes and stations, biking is cheaper than driving, provides exercise and produces zero emissions

So that: You'll have more energy, time and peace of mind to focus on the things that matter most to you





Marketing strategy

- Leverage branding to drive messaging strategy and creative execution
- Modify tactics as needed based on survey data
- Use inexpensive or free VCU media channels
- Target primarily students
- Use special incentives to kick-off program
- Look for experiential promotional opportunities



Media plan

Integrating the marketing across a broad range of media will yield the best results.

- Website landing page
- TelegRAM
- Axis TV
- Video
- VCU News
- Bus placards
- Stall Seat Journal
- Social media
- Commonwealth Times

Usage of these channels will be staged across a calendar year to optimize the delivery based on events, academic calendar and seasonal usage.



Creative

We've developed concepts to reflect the style and tactics for the following executions.

- Poster
- Banner
- Print ad



POSTER



BANNER



Resource need estimate

- Creative development
 - \$7,500 - \$9,500
- Media and print production
 - \$2,000 - \$3,000

Total estimated cost for launch and 4-month media campaign

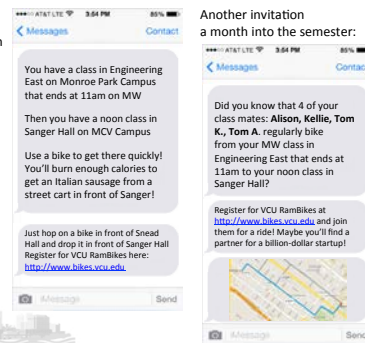
– \$9,500 - \$12,500

Estimated timing: 8 – 10 weeks



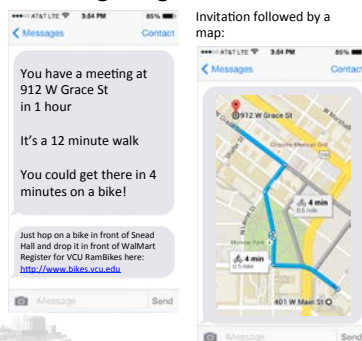
Personalized marketing: targeted invitations

- Personalized invitation at the start of a semester
- Based on integration with student's class schedule and cross-checking other students' schedules and riding patterns



Personalized marketing: targeted invitations

- Email or text message with a targeted invitation for staff and faculty
- Based on integration with user's Google Calendar



Keeping users involved

- Online **personalized dashboard** that shows:
 - Calorie tracker
 - You biked 2 hours this week – that's 10 donuts!
 - VCU burned 100,000 calories this week
 - Saved fuel
 - Saving money – calculate \$ saved
 - Saving the Earth – calculate reduced CO₂ emissions
 - Comparison of user scores with the average/total scores of RamBikes users
 - Estimated cost of personalized marketing IT development: \$10,000+



Addressing safety concerns

- Biking in an urban setting
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)

"Be a Roll Model"

- Don't be distracted
- Expect the unexpected
- Wear a helmet
- Follow the rules of the road
- Share the road



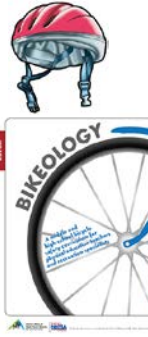
2010 VCU State of Cycling report identified several safety problems:

Helmet use
(only 16% of riders)
"Wrong-way" riding
(6% of riders)
Sidewalk riding
(23% of riders)



Bike safety campaign

- Teaching proper bike use and signaling ("Cycle sense")
- Adapting available tips, e.g.:
<http://bikeleague.org/content/rules-road-0>
- National bicycle safety curriculum (through SHAPE: Society of Health and Physical Educators of America)



Safety in numbers

- "The safest places to cycle are those with high cycle use"
(UK National Cycling Charity)
- Incentives to TRY the bike share program
 - First month of use = free
 - Free helmet to first 100 users (\$20 x 100 = \$2000)
 - Free T-shirt when you sign up (\$10 per user)
- Incentives to use the bike share program MORE OFTEN
 - Monthly scoreboard – winners get a T-shirt:
 - User with highest mileage
 - User with highest number of hops
 - Users forming the largest group travel on a single route

