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Market Research Concept for Website:

## *Make the Most of It*

The campus is **yours**, the time is **now**.

**Elevator Pitch:** People say that the college experience is the best four years of your life; alumni and graduating seniors will tell you that this time flies by all too quickly. MaketheMostofIt.org is a website that uses an interactive list naming “100 Things to Do Before You Graduate from Ramapo!” to build a school identity, foster community among students and faculty and preserve the Ramapo College experience. Make the Most of It functions as a “college coach” or guide to undergraduate life at Ramapo that will be used to energize the campus and strengthen school spirit and tradition, while highlighting individuals, organizations, locations and experiences connected with the list. There are approximately 6,000 students at Ramapo — interact with each other, see what everyone is doing, earn campus rewards and local discounts by getting involved and cross as many items off the list as you can before the end of senior year. From the day you step onto campus as a freshman until the moment you walk across the stage at graduation, the campus is yours. You have four years. What will you check off your list?

**Markets:** The concept for this website is rooted in the idea of blogging through a journey outlined in a list. One example of this is The Julie/Julia Project, in which Julie Powell cooked her way through Julia Child’s “Mastering the Art of French Cooking” and blogged about her experiences (Powell). An example more specific to the idea of Make the Most of It is Bucket List

Journey, “an unconventional guide to living everyday like your last,” in which Annette Renee White encourages people to master “the art of living their life through their bucket list” (White). Make the Most of It has similarities to both, but has a narrower target audience that is specific to the Ramapo College community; the site is a guide for this community to master the art of college life at Ramapo before graduation. Other similar sites and blogs that exist mainly just have lists themselves, or individual articles with lists and some hyperlinks, but little to no content about experiencing the items on them or the environment they are tailored to. Examples include articles on The Cornell Daily Sun (Finkelstein), The Harvard Crimson (Fortini) and the University of Massachusetts Amherst Alumni Association (100 Things to Do). There is nothing at all examining the “100 Things to Do Before You Graduate from Ramapo!” list, or anything like it at any other college as far as I saw in my research. Make the Most of It is more far-reaching than simply providing a list — it is a unique, interactive experience uniting members of the campus community.

My target audience is the Ramapo College community, including students and faculty, but mainly students between the ages of 17 and 25. They are freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. The campus spans approximately 300 acres, is only 30 miles from New York City, and has a total enrollment of nearly 5,300 undergraduate and 300 graduate students, with over 100 student organizations that could get involved in this ongoing project (Ramapo Admissions). I’m hoping to first attract student leaders and students looking to get involved and, in doing so, attract others who normally would not be as motivated to participate. They would benefit from having the opportunity to follow the experiences of their peers and by finding new things to do, while expressing school spirit, staying involved on campus and encouraging others to do the same. Currently, this niche audience gets its information solely from pages on the Ramapo

College website (such as the pages for Student Activities and the Center for Academic Advisement and First-Year Experience) and from posters and individual club meetings and events on campus. Make the Most of It would pool and expand upon these resources, creating an interactive experience, rather than just pages of text, for the target audience.

**Focus Group:** In conducting market research for the concept of this niche site, I assembled a focus group of five Ramapo students from the Center for Academic Advisement and First-Year Experience and Peer Facilitation program, and one alumna working on campus as a graduate assistant. The members of the focus group represented different genders, ages, class statuses and academic programs on campus. Some were residents and others were commuters. The participants were familiar with the “100 Things” list, and engaged in an active discussion on how to apply the concept for Make the Most of it online.

The focus group had a very positive reaction to the initial idea for the site. Multiple participants claimed to “love” the bucket list concept, and immediately proposed using the site to address complaints of there not being enough school spirit or weekend activities on campus. They suggested branding the site across campus by getting more clubs and offices involved, and creating a contest with point values and rewards that could be assessed on Senior Day and during Senior Send-off. For example, item 35 on the list says, “Attend the annual concert,” so Roadrunner Central could advertise for ticket sales by promoting the event as fulfilling item 35 on the “100 Things” list. This would help generate interest in clubs, organizations and activities on campus.

According to the sample audience, the site should use the blogging technique and word of mouth in an attempt to involve and unite members of the campus community, build an identity and promote school spirit by encouraging people to participate in old Ramapo traditions, and to

create new experiences. The participants suggested restructuring the list and making it more interactive by having different clubs, organizations and offices replace outdated items with new ones. Peer facilitators could start getting students involved in their freshman year by asking them what five things they would suggest adding to the list, and by encouraging professors to count certain items on the list toward experiential credit. According to Daniel Jean, director of the Center for Academic Advisement and First-Year Experience, the freshman retention rate at Ramapo is currently around 87 percent; with the biggest complaint among students being that “there’s nothing to do on campus,” perhaps this site could be used as a tool to increase that retention rate. Ramapo’s campus is always growing and changing, so the participants thought that the same should go for the list and the site. They also said that some of the items on the list should be modified to make them more accessible to students (for example, calling into a radio show on WRPR instead of hosting your own), including those who are handicapped.

Members of the focus group said that they and others could use it as a means to fulfill and submit experiential learning components, to highlight areas, resources and people on campus (specifically those connected with items on the list) and to organize group trips and activities both on and off campus. People could constantly suggest items to add to the list, and students and faculty members could create accounts and invite others to join. One participant suggested creating a Facebook application to connect with the site, allowing people to update their statuses showing which item they have just crossed off their lists and how many points they’ve accumulated. Students could be rewarded with freebies and discounts to places on and off campus (such as Ramapo sweatshirts or passes for late night dining) for reaching milestones on the list, and could receive larger prizes and possibly a special cord or pin to wear at graduation if they have completed all items on the list by graduation. The site could also be used as an

Admissions tool, giving students and families on campus tours copies of the list and a chance to check off one or two items on it.

Participants in the focus group inspired ideas for the following sections or channels on the site: What I'm Doing (a personal page on which a student would log in and have access to his or her own checklist to update information and interact with others on the site), Featured Stories (blog content submitted from users or myself about experiences with items on the list, as well as a spotlight on certain students, areas or organizations corresponding with items on the list), Top 10 (the top 10 most popular list items at the time, based on polls and items checked off on personal pages), 1-100 (a section where people can start creating pages for each numbered item on the list — such as “Groundhog Sightings,” “Frisbee Scores” or “Stories from Abroad,” complete with photos submitted by users), My Major (a focus on major-specific list items), Make It an Item (a place for people to suggest list items), Check it Off (a section to find events on the academic calendar and Roadrunner Central schedule that are also on the list), Sponsor a Trip (a way for clubs, organizations and offices to organize trips based on list items), Tip Me Off (a cheat sheet to provide helpful hints for completing the list and checking off certain items), Faculty (resources for faculty, including a place for them to access experiential learning assignments submitted by students) and Alumni (where former students would be able to reflect on their experiences and discuss “100 Things to Do After Graduation”).

**Sustainability:** In order to generate revenue for this site, I plan to feature advertisements from clubs, organizations and offices on campus, as well as from local off-campus businesses, a combination favored unanimously (over using only internal ads or only external ads) by members of the focus group. The majority of internal ads would come from the Center for Academic Advisement and First-Year Experience (CAAFYE), the Office of Admissions, the

Office of Residence Life and the Cahill Center, as well as from popular clubs and organizations on campus. Local businesses such as Moe's Southwest Grill, Stateline Diner, McDonald's, Jersey Boys Pizza, Dairy Queen, Nail Studio and Supercuts of Ramsey could advertise and offer discount coupons, possibly becoming part of the Roadrunner Advantage Program if they are not already.

As suggested by the focus group participants, I could use funding from group trips based on list items, and could possibly lobby for a \$1-\$5 tuition fee for maintenance of the site. I would also ask for donations to fund certain projects and would sell merchandise, such as T-shirts saying "iMaketheMostofIt" or with the numbers and descriptions of certain items on the list checked off. I might also be able to charge students for accessing the Tips section of the site. And once the site generated some money, I could request to advertise through print advertisements in *The Ramapo News*, commercials on WRPR and RCTV and blast e-mails through Ramapo's Daily Digest.

**Storyboard:** The content for this site would be reported, self-generated and user-generated. For a mock-up visual representation of Make the Most of It, see the work in progress online at <https://gomockingbird.com/mockingbird/#pptj0gi>.

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