Faculty background on www.RVAtourism.com project for MKTG-675 Digital Marketing by **Butch M. Sarma**

Virginia Commonwealth University Fall 2020, Fall 2021, Fall 2022
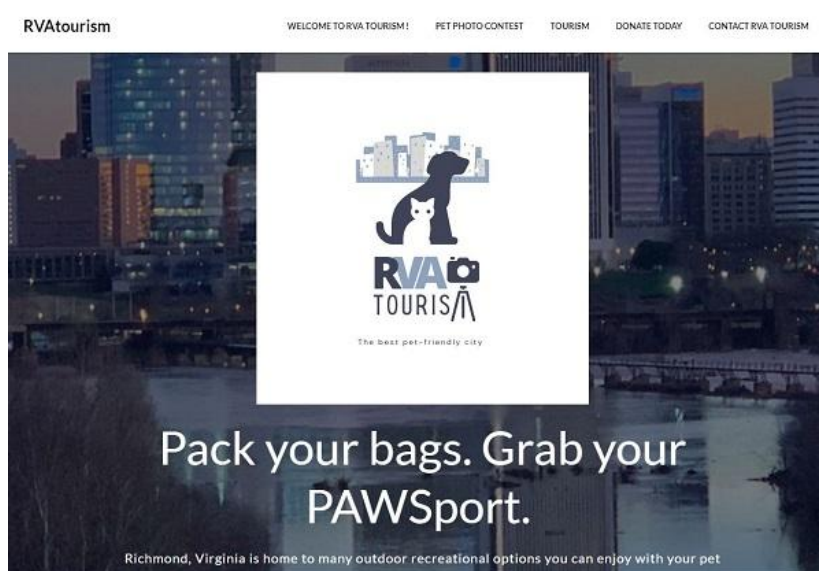
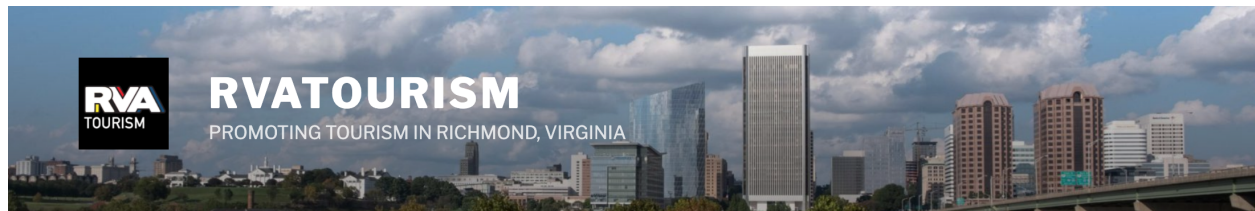Richmond, Virginia USA

8 December 2022 update
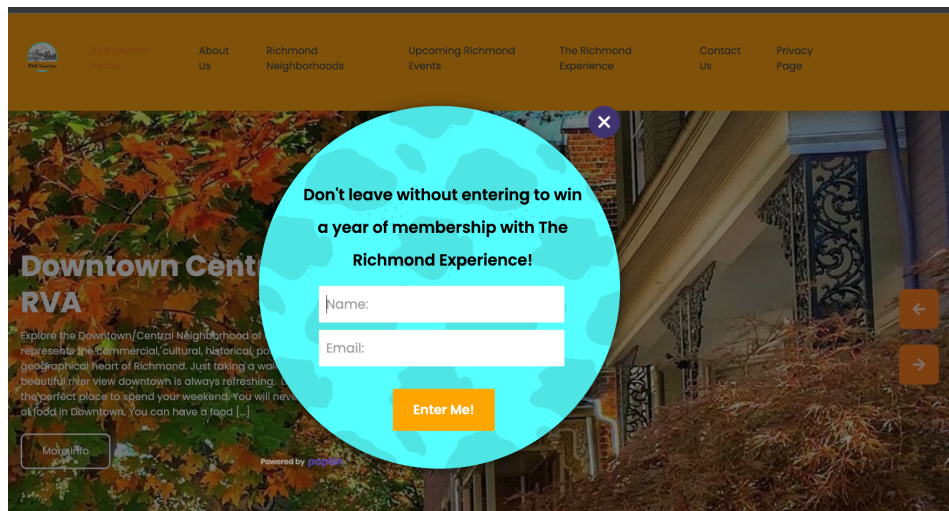
For the Fall 2022 semester, students chose to profile neighborhoods in the city of Richmond, Virginia, and link with a local events company.

19 July 2022 update

In Fall 2021, the students switched to a focus on promoting pet-friendly tourism in RVA. The plan includes pet uploads, voting, and donations to a local animal shelter.

19 November 2020

Goal: To give students experiential learning by building out a tourism-focused website, offering digital products, connecting with social media, and running paid SEM & display ad campaigns. Leverage the "RVA" acronym for the Richmond, Virginia metro area.

Background: MKTG-675 Digital Marketing is an elective for [evening MBA students at Virginia Commonwealth University](). Typically we have 12-16 students with a variety of backgrounds and work experience. This elective is usually offered in the fall to accommodate student schedules. My company, [Ebookmarketingplus.com LLC]() provided help (technology and money for ads) to the project due to the pandemic's impact on procurement here at VCU. I did this same project about five years ago. VCU uses Canvas as the LMS. During the fall 2020 semester, VCU offered this course in a HyFlex format (students may attend in person or join remotely).

Tourism is a broad category and gives students plenty of options. I task the strategy team to develop a plan early in the semester and present it to the class.

Assets:
(November 2020) I asked a local artist to draw some coloring pages of local landmarks and statues. She also prepared a new logo. The students were free to develop their own logo and branding.
- See [RVA coloring pages]()
- See initial [logo]()

Technology:
My company owned the URL [www.RVAtourism.com](). I used my company's existing AWS account to build a WordPress website shell and configure the free SSL. I set up a Gmail account as [rvatourism@gmail.com]() for email, the Facebook page, Google Analytics, GTM, all social media, and Google Ads. We also set up MailChimp account for the collected customer emails. The students then set up a variety of WordPress plugins for analytics, data backups, security, etc.

- AWS Route 53 for domain URL and DNS
- AWS LightSail for WordPress

- Various WordPress plugins
- Google email, GTM, Analytics, and Ads
- Facebook Ads manager
- Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

My Plan:
My basic approach was to work as a digital business by splitting the class into functional teams for key digital roles. The students were assigned to these themes: Strategy, Infrastructure, Discovery, Content, Publicity & Social Media, SEM & Display Advertising, and Analytics.

The work is conceptually phased like this:
Semester start: Strategy team defines the plan. Infrastructure starts prepping the website. Discovery starts on referral sites. Content preps navigation and verbiage.

Early in the semester: Strategy describes the plan and collaborates with other teams. Infrastructure launches the site. Content builds out the pages and posts. Publicity & Social Media prep an editorial calendar and select the platforms. Analytics starts to ID goals. Advertising preps ads.

Mid-semester(early October):-Strategy leads team collaboration and starts a feature Road Map. Infrastructure shifts to maintenance tasks and technical reviews of the Road Map. Content completes all pages. Discovery continues to build out profiles for referral traffic. Advertising starts their campaigns. Analytics begins to report data. Publicity & Social Media are posting.

Late semester(mid-November): Advertising wraps up and presents data. Analytics describes data versus goals. Publicity & Social media share their analytics. Discovery, Strategy, and Infrastructure wind down. All teams make a presentation.

The student's workload was balanced throughout the semester by their team's activity in the three phases described above.

Costs:
- URL registration is about $20 per year
- AWS fees are about $20 per month
- Google ads budget is $100
- Facebook ads budget is $100

For about $300 per semester, this can be a meaningful experiential learning project.

(updated for Fall 2022) Student Materials:
- See class schedule
- See the syllabus for MKTG-675 Digital Marketing
- See RVAtourism.com business guide

Challenges(so far):

- Managing logins for many students on EBMP LLC assets. Two-factor authentication is a real headache. I disabled it briefly to make access easier.
- Team workloads are being done by a few people. The "Free Rider" team problem is difficult to improve. I am considering a peer review.
- Getting Facebook ads approved.

Learnings:
- See zip file of team presentations **(from November 2020)**

Contact:
Butch M. Sarma email: mksarma@vcu.edu

Consider this 4P case on Industrial Hemp: https://www.haighthemp.com/hemp

RVATOURISM
PROMOTING TOURISM IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

WELCOME   SHOP   CART ⌄   CONNECT WITH US   About RVA   Things To Do:

Richmond Chamber of Commerce

Home / Shop

Search ...

SHOP

Showing the single result   Default sorting ⬍

RECENT POSTS

Weekly Update: 11/11/20 – 11/18/20

Weekly Update: 11/2 – 11/9

Happy Halloween!

What to Do: 10/26 – 11/01 Edition

What to Do: 10/18 – 10/24

RECENT COMMENTS

SALE!   VA History

RVA COLORING PAGES

$1.00 $0.00

Add to cart

PAGES

About RVA