



DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

A view of East Jackson Street shows Altria (left) and Health Diagnostic Laboratory (right), two of several companies in Richmond developing ideas and products.

Richmond drives advances in business, sports, music, food

BY JACOB GEIGER
Work It, Richmond

Discussions about innovation in Richmond are often focused on business startups, particularly in the technology sector.

And while new businesses, along with groups that provide funding, office space and mentorship, have proliferated in the area during recent years, the culture of innovation runs far beyond the startup scene. In business, sports, music and food, new products and new ideas are changing the way people live and work.

One source of food innovation is GrowRVA, which operates farmers markets throughout central Virginia. The company's flagship South of the James market opened in Forest Hill Park in 2008 with about 30 vendors. When the summer market season begins May 3, more than 100 vendors will be on site. Thousands of custom-



TIMES-DISPATCH

Hummus maker Sabra, a venture of PepsiCo and Israeli company Strauss Group, is working to see if local farmers can grow chickpeas, the key ingredient in hummus.

ers will visit on each Saturday.

GrowRVA also operates a smaller winter market at Forest Hill Park, and this summer it will offer weekly markets at Short Pump Towne Center, Chimborazo Park, the Millworks Development in Midlothian and Westbury Pharmacy.

In many ways, the markets are a new twist on a very old idea — that people like to eat food grown or made by local producers. The expanding markets have also developed a pool of craft vendors who sell handmade items to the customers who are drawn by the vegetables and friendly atmosphere.

Agriculture and food production, Virginia's largest industry, has also received a jolt in recent years from Sabra, the hummus maker that is a joint venture between PepsiCo and Israeli manufacturer Strauss Group.

A year ago, the company announced plans to open a new facility in Richmond. **INNOVATION, Page E2**

MEDIA

BRANDING BENEFITS

VCU students' work helps sell things and more

BY JOHN REID BLACKWELL
Richmond Times-Dispatch

What do fighting crime on the streets of Richmond and selling luxury cars to twentysomethings have in common?

VCU Brandcenter students have had a hand in finding creative and innovative ways to do both of those things, and much more.

Students at the Brandcenter, recognized as a top graduate advertising program in the nation, have tackled projects in recent years ranging from developing the "RVA" brand to helping law enforcement agencies create more effective crime-fighting messages.

When the Boys Home of Virginia in Covington sought last year to reinvent its marketing to reach a wider audience of potential donors, it got help from the Brandcenter. Eighteen

students volunteered to take a bus to the home's campus in Covington.

"A large group of them came on a Saturday and spent about six hours on campus, touring and meeting our residents," said Donnie Wheatley, executive director of the Boys Home.

The Brandcenter students helped develop a campaign for the Boys Home, including a website, logo and brochures. It centered on the message: "A successful man has to start somewhere."

"It has already succeeded in generating great response from donors and supporters," said Kelly O'Keefe, the professor at the VCU Brand-



O'Keefe

center who teaches the class on innovation.

"The Boys Home is a great example of our students and their commitment to the community."

Students also routinely take on classroom projects that have applications in commerce.

In 2010, when automobile maker

BRANDING, Page E2

TEAMS TAKE ON T-D REDESIGN

BY JOHN REID BLACKWELL
Richmond Times-Dispatch

People tend to think of innovation as being all about inventing something entirely new.

Creating a new product "is awesome, and it happens now and then," said Kelly O'Keefe, nationally known branding expert and a professor of creative brand management at Virginia Commonwealth University's Brandcenter.

"But much more frequently, innovation is taking something that exists that may be a little bit mature and may not have changed enough for a while and bringing new life to it," said O'Keefe, who also is chief creative officer at PadillaCRT.

"That is an important thing because right now in America, 80 percent of our industries are mature industries."

Every semester, O'Keefe assigns his Brandcenter graduate students a project to introduce innovation to a business or product.

This spring, he gave his group of second-year graduate students a particularly challenging assignment. They had to come up with ways to innovate a mature product that has

been upended by the digital media revolution: newspapers.

Specifically, the students took on the task of doing hypothetical redesigns of the print version of the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Not surprisingly, given that so many consumers have turned away from print media to computers, tablets and smartphones to get their news these days, O'Keefe said the students were dubious.

"We were skeptical about whether the paper copy has a future, and if it does, what role will it play in people's lives?" said graduate student Marisa Perazzelli.

Like many of the students, she wants to work as a planner at an advertising firm, doing the kind of strategic thinking that gets people interested in products, services or philanthropic causes.

The students were given four weeks to do research and come up with a revamp of the print edition.

Making it tougher, they had to tackle a problem that the print media industry itself has struggled with for years: How do you rework a print product in a way that will appeal to consumers who are mainly using

TEAMS, Page E3

INNOVATION IN RICHMOND

Teams

From Page E1

electronic devices now without also alienating the customers who still prefer to have a print newspaper delivered to their door every morning?

“It was difficult because this is not just a Richmond Times-Dispatch problem,” student Haik Petrosian said. “It is an industry problem.”

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The 16 grad students, working in four teams of four people each, set out to do what research they could in the short time they had. They drew from existing consumer surveys and also conducted surveys of their own.

They spoke with industry experts, and they visited the Newseum in Washington. They also visited The Times-Dispatch newsroom and interviewed reporters, editors and others at the newspaper.

The solutions they came up with were varied, but could be divided into two broad categories: slow and speed.

The “speed” solutions emphasized offering readers a print version that looks a lot like the short and snappy bits of news and information people typically consume using digital media.

For instance, the team that included Marie Adams, Cierra Dobson, Whitney Keller and Katie Long concluded that the problem with print newspapers is not the content, but the format of the newspaper and the time it takes to read it. Most people simply do not have the time to consume what’s in a daily newspaper, their research showed.

They came up with a revamp of the newspaper that would have a vastly different front page than a traditional one. Instead of a few major stories on the front, they suggested a design that would pack more information on the page in the form of brief news headlines and captions with numerous small photographs.

“Our strategy was to optimize the reading experience for speed,” said Adams, a former Times-Dispatch employee. “In the limited time they have, people could skim the front page and all the headlines and get what they want. Then when they have more time, they could flip the page for the longer articles.”

The team that included Haik Petrosian, Brittany Bell, Kevin Mernin and Marie Matuszewski also opted for a redesign that emphasized quick, easy reading and a wider array of articles to attract a diverse audience.

Their redesign was in some ways a throwback to the way newspapers looked decades ago, when readers would have seen dozens of stories on the front page every day.

The team suggested that the front page should include about 30 “entry points” — or short news stories — every day, with something on the front page from every section of the newspaper.

The other teams took an approach that emphasized the sense of “slowness” in print media versus the speed of its digital competition, suggesting that the meatiness of print media could be an alternative to the cacophony of information in the digital world.

The team of Beth Beckman, Bilal Khan,

Rachel West and Liam Schaefer, for example, suggested that the newspaper should shift from a generalized focus on world, national and local news, and move more toward a “hyperfocus” on local news.

But instead of offering shorter, quick-to-read stories, the paper should include longer, more “conversational” articles of local interest.

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The team of Marisa Perazzelli, Roderick Kashani, Jeremy Chacich and Araba Wilson also suggested that the newspaper should not so much compete with digital media but offer an entirely different experience.

They foresee the future of newspapers as part of the “culture of slow,” a culture that also encompasses fine cuisine, local foods and handmade crafts, appealing to people who desire the authentic, luxury experiences that a fast-paced, fast-food and digital media world can’t offer.

Instead of short news articles, the team suggested longer pieces, more like a magazine. The team was thinking of what a newspaper needs to offer 20 years from now, Perazzelli said.

“It needs to be this long, in-depth, rich, physical experience,” she said.

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The students presented their proposed changes to The Times-Dispatch staff April 8, prompting a lengthy discussion about the future of print media.

Having a strategy-minded group of graduate students look at the product and suggest changes was a useful experience, Times-Dispatch Editor Danny Finnegan said.

“They gave us a great sense of what millennials are looking for in terms of news and information, and how they experience it,” Finnegan said. “There were some ideas that are worth pursuing. There were some ideas that we are already in the midst of doing.”

The newspaper has tried some of the ideas before, such as selling single-copy newspapers with an all-promo front.

“Maybe it is time to explore some of those ideas again,” he said.

Finnegan noted that all four of the student teams suggested changing the newspaper’s name in some way and changing the nameplate at the top of the front page.

One group said its research showed that the word “dispatch” is fading from general use, so it suggested dropping “Dispatch” from the name and simply using “The Richmond Times.”

Other groups suggested using the nameplate “RTD,” or “RVA Times-Dispatch.” O’Keefe said the current Richmond Times-Dispatch nameplate font is a very old print typeface — dating to the mid-1600s.

O’Keefe joked that the students had been warned beforehand that radical changes to the newspaper don’t sit too well with some longtime readers.

“We have been told that if you move Beetle Bailey (comic strip) by a few inches, you are going to hear from them,” he said.

“I can tell you that there is nothing you can do that is going to bring real innovation to the paper without some disruption. In order to make change in any industry, you have to have an open mind towards some change.”

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◆ Use QR codes to enable mobile push notifications for story updates

TEAM ONE: SPEED

RESEARCH

- ◆ Information still seen as crucial across all age groups
- ◆ News readers are increasingly choosing either print or digital, but not both
- ◆ More information sources than ever with the advent of such digital sites as Huffington Post, Politico, BuzzFeed, Facebook and Twitter

CONCLUSIONS

- ◆ The format of the newspaper, and the time it takes to read it, hinders its goal
- ◆ It’s not the message that’s broken; it’s the delivery method we have to fix
- ◆ If printed newspapers are going to survive, they must steal audience from online/mobile

STRATEGIES

- ◆ Optimize the reading experience for speed, making the print edition a time-efficient, one-stop shop for news
- ◆ Turn the front page into a visual index so readers can get the stories FAST. Page One should be a storefront for the newspaper
- ◆ Give readers a digestible, visual taste of what’s inside by combing a headline, an image, a short caption and a page number
- ◆ Retain story hierarchy with image size and placement on front page
- ◆ Create “Inside Stories” box to give readers 10 more headline choices
- ◆ Create “Gotta Run?” feature that allows readers to text a photo of a headline to receive a link to the full story from TimesDispatch.com
- ◆ Interior: Graphics for data and relational information
- ◆ Rundowns to place recent developments in larger context
- ◆ Callouts add dimension, aid scanning



Adams



Dobson



Keller



Long

TEAM TWO: SPEED

RESEARCH

- ◆ The average person is exposed to the equivalent of 174 newspapers’ worth of information a day
- ◆ People who value newspapers overindex for curiosity and value across all five consumer groups
- ◆ None of these consumer groups reads the entire paper, instead choosing certain sections or features
- ◆ Readers are interested in all types of news, ranging from “lowbrow” to “highbrow”

CONCLUSIONS

- ◆ In terms of design, Diversity + Quantity = Exposure
- ◆ Readers want a greater variety of content
- ◆ Consumers will seek their news from the sources that provide the best combination of low cost, reliability, immediacy, ease of access and comprehensiveness

STRATEGIES

- ◆ Redesign front page as an index to the rest of the paper
- ◆ Have every section of the paper represented on the front page
- ◆ Play the three most important stories at the top of the front page with larger photos, followed by a series of smaller photos and text blocks referencing other stories inside the paper
- ◆ Have at least 30 entry points to the rest of the paper on the front page
- ◆ Introduce new advertising options on the front page
- ◆ Add QR code that will allow readers to obtain a PDF of that day’s front page



Bell



Matuszewski



Mernin



Petrosian

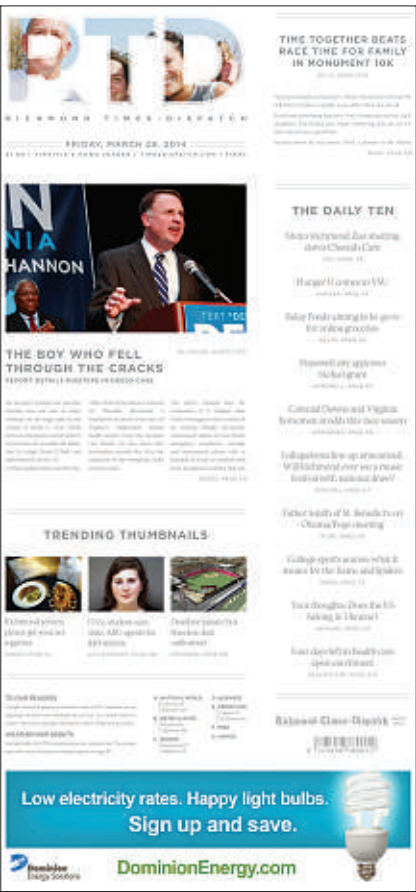
TEAM THREE: SLOW

CONCLUSIONS

- ◆ Digital news sources compete with one another by carving out distinct points of views and personalities
- ◆ Because readers are often aware of the basic details of the story by the time they reach the paper, The Times-Dispatch needs to provide a fresh perspective on national and world news
- ◆ Journalists need to change from “gatekeepers” to conversationalists
- ◆ Digital publications have had more freedom to experiment with layouts and UX (user experience), and have innovated as a result

STRATEGIES

- ◆ Wherever possible, veer toward “lowbrow” or “highbrow” content and away from the middle (fewer Associated Press articles)
- ◆ Use cheat sheets that make national/world news easier to take in
- ◆ Use more analytical opinion pieces, profiles or investigative journalism
- ◆ Add a “Local Box” to national and international stories with commentary and analysis from area residents
- ◆ Move the Metro section to the front section — this is where readers can get news that they may not have read about online yet
- ◆ Make the change from rigid print mindset to social mindset where the journalist is leading the conversation
- ◆ Pick the most emotional and high-quality stories — five to seven per week — to push out on Facebook.
- ◆ Let the text and pictures of big stories breathe so people want to spend time with them
- ◆ Change nameplate to go with a more modern RTD instead of Richmond



Times-Dispatch, and add art to the nameplate to bring more personality



Beckman



Khan



Schaefer



West

TEAM FOUR: SLOW

RESEARCH

- ◆ 72 percent of millennials want to be the source of information to peers
- ◆ 90 percent of millennials say checking their phone is an important part of their day
- ◆ 72 percent prefer long narrative TV series that unfold over a season instead episodic TV
- ◆ 55 percent of DIY enthusiasts are younger than age 35 (the Etsy factor)

CONCLUSIONS

- ◆ There is a misperception that millennials don’t like/enjoy/need news
- ◆ Millennials have a variety of Internet sources to choose from for information
- ◆ Online news consumption fits into a lifestyle of convenience and multitasking
- ◆ “Culture of slow” taking hold among millennials as seen by their dining and entertainment choices

STRATEGIES

- ◆ Newspaper is a time to engage — millennials already have their “convenient” news, so be their “luxury” news
- ◆ Position the physical newspaper as an indulgent experience — the paper suggests leisure
- ◆ Luxury takes more time — it’s well-crafted, a richer experience and a treat that readers will savor
- ◆ Long-form content should average 3,000 words with an emphasis on investigative journalism with pointed writing that inspires debate
- ◆ Use white space to help tailor the reading experience
- ◆ Drop Dispatch from the name — the word “Dispatch” is in declining circulation as the years go by — “Richmond Times” still conveys the trust the newspaper is known for



Kashani



Wilson



Perazzelli



Chacich



Online

See full-size versions of the groups’ pages at TimesDispatch.com