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Project Leaf Year

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Project Leaf Year
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Advised by: Dr. Jerry Schnepp & Dr. Nicholas Hennessy
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Summary of Project

**Scholarly Question:** “Will daily reminders – presented in an intriguing, creative, and engaging format – increase the likelihood of individuals to make environmentally conscious choices?”

On the most basic level, *Project Leaf Year* is an environmentally focused page-a-day desk calendar. However, the calendar is much more as it is a tool to promote an overarching environmental movement. This calendar is sustainable in both its construction and its purpose involving sustainable manufacturing, spiral-binding, and reusable considerations. The calendar itself includes nature photographs from local artists, daily tasks to promote conservation efforts, and supplemental educational information (either through website articles or videos) for the purpose of inspiring individuals to make environmentally conscious decisions.

Throughout this report I will explain my process of making the calendar from conception to completion. I will discuss the purpose and features of the calendar in further depth as well as the environmental considerations involved to get to the final product.

Inspiration/Ideation

January 2019, I had the opportunity to attend a faculty-led study abroad trip in New Zealand delving into the topics of environmentalism through philosophy, culture, and art. While on this trip our group met up with a world-renowned environmental sculptor, Martin Hill. Hill has dedicated his life’s work to creating environmentally conscious pieces using only materials from the environment. Since environmental sculptures are ephemeral – or fleeting – in nature, the only artifacts left of Hill’s sculptures are his photographs. In order to get his name and message out while he was beginning his career, Hill placed his photographs on greeting cards. He chose this medium because he wanted to get the message out to as many people as possible. Greeting cards are a much more tangible medium to most people than large artistic prints.
As our class looked around Hill’s studio mesmerized by the photographs of his pieces and featured articles in magazines, one student asked how we could take Hill’s message with us back to the states. Though there are many suggestions of the things we could do, the simplest and most obvious answer was to educate others. Climate change is an issue that affects everyone, yet not everyone is particularly concerned about it. The most beneficial thing that can be done, in Martin Hill’s eyes, is to educate others to show them the pertinence of the issue.

I took this information to heart and thought about interesting and engaging ways for individuals to become more interested in environmental conservation. One of the biggest pitfalls I noticed is that most people believe this is the job of big business and government, not of individuals. Like voting, most people do not believe their individual actions will make much of an impact. Most believe doing an act to improve the environment, whether it be recycling, reusable water bottles, straw alternatives, etc. will do very little to solve the issue. I strongly disagree with this concept as I believe that everyone is able to take action, regardless of the size of their reach.

The following year (2020) carries a lot of important dates including leap year and the presidential election. Aside from that, the issue of climate change has only become more relevant as the days go on. We see this impact through various news outlets, the increasing interest of a zero-waste lifestyle, and Greta Thunberg – youth environmental activist – was chosen as TIME’s 2019 Person of the year.

While it is very easy for people to point fingers and say that environmental issues are the fault of someone else, it is not as simple for people to take the time to look at the impact of their own actions. For this project, my wish was to create a piece that not only allows people to
understand what they can be doing on an individual level, but also to educate them on the impact of the choices they make every day. This is where the idea came for Project Leaf Year, an environmentally focused, page-a-day desk calendar with a multitude of features to increase user’s awareness of the environmental impact of their everyday actions.

For this project, I have brainstormed more than just a standard desk calendar. This calendar will be an overall environmental movement to unite people in an effort to decrease their carbon footprint and take action to reverse the harmful effects of climate change. This calendar will be both sustainably-printed and reusable to promote its environmental message – read below how this can be made possible.

![Project Leaf Year Calendar Mock-up](image-url)

**Calendar Logistics**

When telling others about my idea for this project, many of them stated that 366 was a large task to take on. Many suggested that I try making a smaller monthly calendar that only required 12 different spreads. While this would have been much less of a stressful burden on myself, I do not believe that it would have the same impact as a calendar that has a different page every single day. Calendars with pages every single day consist of the following features:
• **Engagement:** A standard monthly calendar carries a sense of complacency with it. Users are only required to turn the page of the calendar once every 30 days and may not take the time to look at the calendar every day. A page-a-day calendar, on the other hand, requires a daily engagement showing that the user is willing to put forth the effort to at least change the page every single day.

• **Excitement:** With a standard monthly calendar, users may get bored of the chosen month’s photo near the middle of the month. This calendar includes a new, professional photo every single day. Along with this, every day comes with a new challenge/habit that users can adopt.

• **Impact:** It would be ridiculous to ask someone to adopt 366 different environmental habits. The thought of doing so may turn people off to the thought of trying out any challenge at all. That being said, 366 different challenges have a much larger impact than 12. It is more likely that a user will choose to incorporate a few of the challenges into their life if there is a large pool to choose from.

Why did you choose the design of the calendar?

*Front of the Page*

**Photos:** The front of each page will include a photograph from local artists in the area. These photos will be environmentally focused and will include subject matter such as: landscapes,
wildlife, plants, etc. These photos will be high quality and visually appealing. Though they will be from different artists, they will have an overall unified look and feel due to the focused topic.

**Dates:** In addition to these photos, the front of the page will have the date – obviously something that is very important for a calendar. However, this will not be the standard day, month, date (i.e. Tuesday, August 21, 2020) set-up because that would negate the reusable factor of the calendar. The dates will be set up in a day, date manner (i.e. August 21) to encourage use for multiple years.

**Holidays:** Since the calendar is being promoted for use during multiple years, it is not possible to have holidays that do not fall on certain days of the year. For example, Thanksgiving is the third Thursday of November and does not fall on the same date every year while Christmas will be on December 25th every single year. It is important to note that some holidays carry religious affiliation or cultural benefits to one group but not another, such as Christmas vs Hanukkah. In order to keep this calendar completely environmentally focused, only “Green Holidays” will be placed on the calendar. An example of one of these holidays would be Earth Day because it falls on April 22 every year, but Arbor Day could not be included because it falls on a different date every year.
Crediting the Artist: It is important for an artist to receive credit for their photographs. For this reason, each artist will receive a small section on the back of the calendar that states, “Get to Know the Photographer.” In this section, the viewer can see the artist’s name, social media handle, and personal website. This allows the artist to receive exposure for their work and allows the user to follow the artist if they would like to see more of their work.

Sustainable Challenges: This section is arguably the most important section of the calendar and includes a call-to-action statement for the user. This will include a sustainable task/habit for the user to adopt to be more sustainable on an individual level. This will range from a wide variety of topics and levels of difficulty. It is not expected that the user will take on every challenge, but it is expected that simply seeing the challenges will increase the awareness of the environmental impact of their actions.

Categories: The sustainable challenges will be broken down into 8 different categories:

- **Water Usage** – reducing the overall amount of water usage and promoting conservation
- **Waste Reduction** – reducing the amount of overall waste and considering alternatives to throwing out trash including composting and purchasing biodegradable products
- **Community** – Teaming together with like-minded people to advocate for the passion of a common cause
- **Energy Usage** – reducing the overall amount of energy used and finding alternatives power sources such as wind and sun
- **Plastic Usage** – reducing the amount of harmful plastics used and finding more environmentally-friendly, recyclable plastics
- **Air Quality** – minimizing tasks that result in harmful air pollution and finding more sustainable alternatives
• *Food Waste* – reducing the amount of waste from uneaten food and food spoilage

• *General Consumption* – becoming a conscious consumer by critically thinking about the necessity of a purchase and researching companies before making a buying decision

**Inconvenience Meter:** All the challenges will be doable for an individual, but some tasks will be much more difficult, or rather more inconvenient, than others. The inconvenience of a task will be measured by the number of leaves on the back of the calendar. Examples of challenges could include:

- **Easy (1 leaf)** – start using a reusable water bottle
- **Medium (2 leaves)** – gather a group of community members to do a neighborhood trash clean-up
- **Hard (3 leaves)** – purchase a car with a high fuel-efficiency

*Figure 7: Inconvenience Meter*

**Supplemental Information:** All the challenges will be accompanied by a supplemental information from a credible author of a reliable source. This could manifest itself in the form of a video, a website, or an article. These can be reached via the physical calendar through a Quick-Response (QR) code.

**Project Reflection**

When first creating the idea for this project, I did not fully understand the scope. The initial concept of creating a front and back page with certain features was fairly simple but having to uniquely duplicate that 366 times came to be a challenge. For this reason, I did not reach my end goal of creating a completed calendar, however, I have almost all the assets compiled to create a final design of the calendar in its entirety. However, this process taught me valuable skills in organizing long term projects and assets and assistance from the Visual Communication Technology Department and other NW Ohio organizations to complete the project after this semester.

This process brought about a lot of unexpected roadblocks that knocked me off of my original path. Whenever there were additional considerations for the project, I tended to get consumed
and forget about my ultimate goal. For example, my faculty advisor and I talked about additional uses for the calendar including outside packaging that doubled as displays, or even an additional pen holder to the calendar. As I began thinking of ideas for these, I got distracted from my other tasks such as contacting artists and continuing to research challenges.

Looking back now, I believe that I could have attacked this process in a more efficient way by breaking it down into smaller, more tangible tasks and not looking at the entirety of the big picture. That said, I am very pleased with the progress that I have made, and this has been a tremendous learning curve. I believe this is one of the greatest benefits of doing supplemental research in college because I am able to make mistakes and learn from them without having major repercussions (as might happen in the workforce).

One of the biggest things that I learned throughout this process are my personal strengths and weaknesses. When I took on this project I committed to the roles of administrator, coordinator, project manager, organizer, designer, prototyper, and financial advisor – essentially taking on the work of an entire team. This is not uncommon for most entrepreneurial or freelance projects, but it is an unfamiliar concept to me. I found that I excelled in the areas that were particularly interesting to me, such as design and prototyping, but struggled to have the same enthusiasm with tasks that were not my specialty, including financial budgeting and administration. Nonetheless, I find it incredibly useful that I had to take on multiple roles throughout this project and it is certainly something that I can use for additional passion projects or as I look to go into the workforce.

Further Research

Though much thought and consideration went into this project, there are still areas to improve. One of the biggest downfalls for the project is it may not be beneficial to those who are not interested in using a daily desk calendar. However, the overall concept can still be used in another consideration as I will explain below.

Google Chrome has many customizable features including extensions that can be added to the browser. The two extensions that I would like to discuss include Ecosia and Momentum. First, I will discuss Momentum. Momentum allows you to replace a new tab page with a professional landscape photo that changes daily, personal dashboard featuring to-do, weather, and inspiration, and more. The idea of this seemingly simple extension is that it allows users to be more productive. Over 3 million people around the world use the Momentum extension because they are able to get the following features:

- New professional photo each day
- Inspirational quote each day
• Set a daily goal/focus/intention
• Keep track of tasks with To-do list
• See the weather and forecast
• Customize the dashboard by showing/hiding widgets
• Feel good and get things done!

One of the biggest highlights of the extension is it is seen every single time the user opens their browser or a new tab.

The second extension I want to talk about is Ecosia. Unlike Momentum, Ecosia is actually a search engine. Ecosia can be reached from any web browser by searching the domain: https://www.ecosia.org/. This web browser is environmentally focused and uses its ad revenue to plant trees. Ecosia achieves its mission through:

• Complete Transparency – publishing monthly financial reports so users can see exactly where the income from the searches go
• Carbon Neutrality – Their servers run on 100% renewable energy, and every search request removes one kilogram of CO2 from the atmosphere.
• Privacy Friendly
  o Doesn’t store searches permanently
  o Doesn’t sell data to advertisers
  o Searches are encrypted
  o Doesn’t use external tracking tools
  o Gives the user the ability to turn off all trackers
Since its founding in 2009, Ecosia has gathered a community of 15 million users and has planted over 77 million trees around the world. Their goal is ultimately to “cultivate a more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable world, they want to reverse the tide of deforestation by planting a billion native trees,” (direct quote from Ecosia’s website).

As you can see, the mission and goals of Ecosia align perfectly with Project Leaf Year. An additional consideration for the project could include redesigning the search page for Ecosia to create something that bears resemblance to Momentum. This page could include many of the aspects of Project Leaf Year including: daily sustainable challenges (along with associated categories and inconvenience meter), nature photos from local artists (as well as the artist’s contact information), and supplemental information to the challenge to show its importance and impact.

This might appeal to a younger generation and those who are constantly surfing the web. This part of the project was ideated this semester, but not attempted. This is strictly an idea for further reach of the calendar and sustainable message.