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With regard to: Online Open Days

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1. Introduction and problem definition

The University of Groningen (UG) has invested great efforts in developing open days for its prospective students. Three times per year, the city welcomes many prospective students, interested in obtaining higher education in Groningen. The lengths to which the UG goes to ensure everyone is welcome during these days – from distributing information packages and organizing city walks, to introducing free bus tickets and an booth for international students – are certainly impressive.

There is one issue which has not yet been thoroughly addressed, however. Namely, the UG still needs to find a way to compensate for the fact that it can be very difficult for an international student to attend such open days. Needless to say, it requires a great deal of motivation, time, and resources on behalf of the prospective student to travel from China, Eastern Europe, or even nearby Germany only to see whether Groningen seems to be a good place for them. Therefore, those international students who do attend the open days are likely to be different from the average international student. They are most probably better informed about the university, and already have a strong intention to study here anyway. To ensure that the UG becomes established better internationally, it is important to reach out beyond only those highly motivated students, as well as open up to those who cannot afford to travel to Groningen for just one day.

2. Elaboration

2.1 Better outreach to international students

In line with the UG's internationalization policy, and its ambitions of becoming a truly international university, it is essential to ensure that students from all over the world can enjoy a good overview of what the UG has to offer without having to physically be present during an open day. There are several ways in which this is currently being done. For example, by being present at education fairs abroad, or through working with educational services companies, the UG is able to connect with a substantial amount of internationals. These, and other ways of reaching students could provide great outcomes, however each has its downsides, and each of them is able to target only a fairly narrow subset of prospective students.

Lijst Calimero believes that a newer and more advanced method of reaching out to students needs to come online. In a time where virtually every international student who has come to the UG has sought out information through the university webpage, it is only reasonable to have the very best information available there. The current attractive attempt to show students what the city of Groningen really looks like (available [here](#)) needs a lot of improvement. The page is hard to navigate, and the

information contained there is not exhaustive. As for the Open Days, there is barely anything that students can do [online](#), other than to learn when the open days take place. In general, much of the otherwise very useful information offered on the website is scattered, and essential things may remain undiscovered by students who first encounter the university website.

We see an opportunity in this, and suggest that the UG follows the [example](#) of many other international universities in creating an online environment where students get the possibility to look around the university facilities. We believe that if prospective students were able to experience what being a student at the UG truly *feels* like, the chances of them deciding to actually enroll for one of our programs will increase. Needless to say, this also offers many possibilities for advancing the procedures the UG uses to select its students, and matching in particular. Groningen offers a unique experience to its students, not only through its education, but also through its vibrant and active (night) life and student communities, as the slogan “The City is our Campus” so clearly suggests. To integrate all this in one place, we propose creating a self-guided environment with all the essential information a student should know, both about the city, and their selected study.

2.2 Self-guided online tours

Lijst Calimero proposes making this possible through creating of a virtual “student for a day” environment, where prospective internationals could get a sense of what it feels like to be a student at the UG. This could be developed in the form of interactive guided tours which show what attending an actual lecture looks like, but also what paying a visit to the Academy Building, the University Library, work groups, but also the ACLO, or even what student accommodation feels like. Prospective students should be offered the possibility to sign up for web classes in their selected field. Once the web classes offered by the UG become available later in 2016, they should also be integrated seamlessly into the Online Open Day environment.

The University of Groningen would not be the first one to have a virtual environment like this. Indeed, many international universities are already enjoying very detailed online guided tours which their prospective students can explore through the website, and Lijst Calimero sees it as an essential step for the UG to keep up with this trend. With marvelous 3D photography, and the possibility to navigate through the university buildings (like the one could use Google Street View to navigate through streets), the guided tours provide an inside-and-out view of the whole university in all its glory. Such online tours can be created either by hiring international companies, who specialize in this, or locally, by hiring

Groningen-based, and filmmakers and photographers. For a variety of possible options, please refer to section *2.3 Financial matters*.

Of course, 3D photography is not the only possibility for showing students what Groningen looks like, nor is it necessarily the best way of doing it. Simple, professional videos showing the lively atmosphere in and around the university buildings can also be of great importance for allowing prospective students to feel the vitality of Groningen. Through capturing the touch-and-feel of Groningen on video, we would be able to bring the city's unique atmosphere to our prospective international students. This can be a good approach for locations where a lot of student activity takes place, such as the University Library and large lecture halls, but also small workgroups (e.g. at the University College Groningen), and facilities such as the ACLO.

Videos and 3D photography can also be seamlessly integrated within one online environment. This way online visitors can 'walk' around the city, and stop to see a short video of what the place they find themselves at looks like during an usual day. This is technically feasible, and produces a very attractive combination to look at.

2.3 Financial matters

While creating such an online environment does involve some initial costs, this is a sustainable investment, which will continue to pay off over multiple years. Making the right choices from the beginning will help reduce the long-term costs, and ensure high quality for a longer time. Lijst Calimero took the liberty of conducting some market research before putting this memo together, and an indication of the costs from three different providers is presented below:

2.3.1 Provider 1: Using the services of this provider, who specializes in creating online environments for universities, will probably yield the most professional-looking results, and it also comes with the highest maintenance costs. With basic costs of approximately €30,000 per tour, including travel and staying costs for the photographers, this provider is sure to deliver a high-end result. It is important to point out that the photographers would have to be flown in to The Netherlands once every several years to ensure every building has its most recent images taken. From year 2 onwards, such an update will cost €7,250 per year.

2.3.2 Provider 2: Creating a 3D Google Maps experience of the university buildings is a somewhat more moderately priced, yet still very visually attractive solution. This photographer is certified by Google to take 3D images in Google Maps style. The asking price is €50 per 5 shots, which are then

stitched into a panorama, and €65 per hour of editorial work. The provider offers a discount for larger projects. The added value here is this provider is based in Groningen, and is always available to update their work, with very little extra costs.

2.3.3 Provider 3: Capturing the student life on video would likely be the least expensive task to handle, while still maintaining the quality of production very high. This filmmaker's rates are fixed at €50 per hour, including filming time and editorial work. Using this provider's services would also allow for taking aerial shots of the UG, and the city of Groningen by using a special drone. Since this provider is also based in Groningen, it would be very inexpensive to update and replace outdated videos, while maintaining the same atmosphere by using their services.

3. Plan for action

To make sure this project does come to life, we have assembled a plan for action. Following these steps will ensure that the students as well as the staff of the university are involved in the creation of an environment that works and is useful.

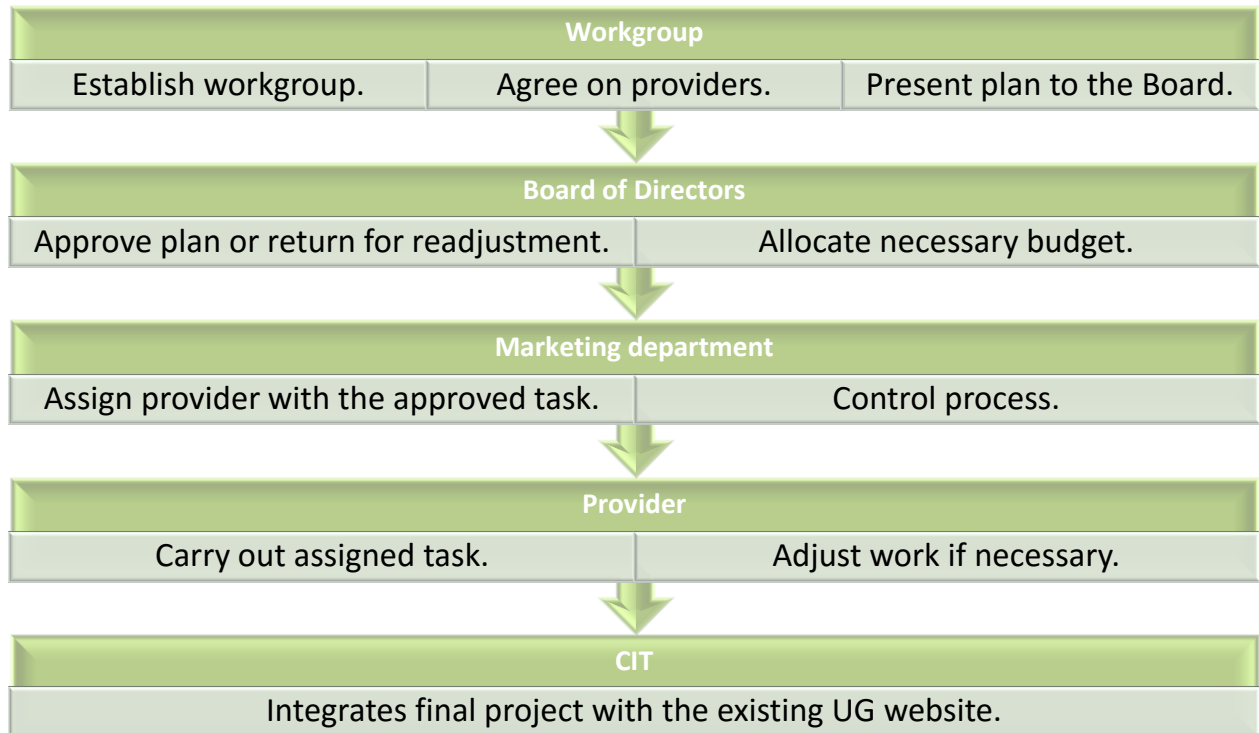
Step 1: A workgroup is assembled. Its core consist of a member of the communication/marketing department of the UG; a member of the CIT department; at least 2 students – international and Dutch, preferably from different levels of education (i.e. master and bachelor programs); and a member of the teaching personnel. This group clearly defines the scope of the project – which buildings, lectures, events, facilities, etc. would be included in the prospective online environment, and in what form. They also have the task to agree on (a) provider(s) who can fulfill the needs best. Finally, the workgroup has the task of assembling a price plan and present this to the Board of the university.

Step 2: The University's Board approves a budget, based on the proposition of the workgroup, or returns the proposal for adjustment.

Step 3: The approved proposal is sent to the communication/marketing department of the UG, who establish contact with the selected provider(s). The provider(s) carry their work out.

Step 4: The provider(s) carry their work out. The providers' work is assessed by the Board and the workgroup. Potential imperfections are communicated to the provider, and sent out for improvement.

Step 5: Once completed, the project is integrated into the UG website with the help of the CIT department.



4. Conclusion

With statistics showing the worrisome trends of the aging population in Western Europe, and with fewer students deciding to stay in Groningen to obtain their masters degrees, the University might be losing some of its most valuable assets. The sooner we start looking for alternatives, the better off we will be several years from now. One of the most obvious and effective alternatives we have is to keep up with the current trends in expanding our market beyond the borders of Groningen, and those of The Netherlands.

Through creating an online open day environment, featuring high-quality 3D photography and professionally made videos showcasing the city and the university itself, we can send a strong message to prospective students coming from abroad. This should be accompanied with a sample of our cutting-edge education, for example, through web classes in a variety of fields. Such an environment should be one separate entity, allowing prospective students to get the full picture of the Groningen experience, without having to physically come to the city – a valuable opportunity for those doubting whether Groningen would suit them right. This holds for students coming from other countries, but also for those who have already obtained a Bachelor’s degree elsewhere in The Netherlands, and are looking for a change of setting for following their Masters.