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360 Sounds: Drum Sample Packs with Supporting Video Series and Website

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Thesis Project Proposal: Table of Contents

1. Project Overview

My senior project will be a series of drum sample packs that explores what exactly it means to achieve "good" drum sounds through recording drum kits in diverse studio environments using a plethora of varied techniques, equipment, and engineers. My goal is to record three drum sound "packs" (consisting of single-hit sounds of bass drums, snares, toms, high hats, crash and ride cymbals—the number of each will vary per pack), each kit consisting of uniquely different sounds suitable to a specific genre. I then plan to use Pro Tools (with a hybrid of software plugins and hardware outboard gear) to mix these individual sounds to enhance what is naturally captured during the recording process. These "sampled" sounds from each part of the kit will be my project's main product. I also plan to create a short documentary-style video series on the various techniques used in my project, along with advice from some of the engineers I plan to bring in during the sample recording process. Ideally, I would like to bring together the sample packs and video series by creating a website to sell these samples, using the videos and a series of testimonials as marketing tools. This would not only be a way for me to explore both recording audio and video, but would allow me to gain experience with marketing within the realm of music technology/production products. After the finalization of the drum samples, videos, and website, I plan to write an artistic reflection on the creative process for all aspects of the project, the challenges the project presented, and what I was able to accomplish overall.

Drums are the foundation of any piece of music; because of this, it is impossible to create even a decent mix of a song without first taking the time to really mold and sculpt drum sounds. This is a painstaking process that includes extreme attention to detail in every aspect—selecting and placing microphones, tuning the drum kit, guiding the drummer to play in the pocket, adding effects processing, editing the drum tracks into single-hit takes after recording. Oftentimes (especially in the more commonplace lower-budget sessions that often don't have the finances to spend an adequate amount of time perfecting drum recording), the original drum sounds that are captured during a session aren't ideal for mixing: this is where the power of utilizing samples comes into play. These sampled sounds—which are pre-recorded, isolated elements of each element of a drum kit, such as the kick drum, snare, et al—can be placed underneath a less-than-ideal "real" drum kit recorded during the song's tracking session to enhance whatever element is missing. For instance, if a kick drum was recorded without any low-end *umph* to it, a sampled kick can be blended under the original track to emphasize what's missing while sounding natural and also not requiring the entire kit to be overdubbed.

Having spent the time to create well-made drum kit sample sounds will force me to become a better engineer, especially when it comes to recording drums during sessions, which is a vital skill; these sounds will also create a palette for my own use (and, ideally, the use of others) in future mixing projects, helping me assemble my personal engineering toolkit for beyond college graduation. Additionally, being able to plan and then produce a series of videos documenting the recording process utilized during this project will allow me to become a better videographer, which is something I'm passionate about and is a vital skill in the music industry. This video series will ideally also serve as a strong marketing tool for my drum sample packs.

2. Project Synopsis

My thesis project is centered around three main pieces: the actual drum audio samples themselves, the video series used to market the samples, and the website used to promote the videos and sell the drum samples.

1. ***The Drum Samples***

The recordings of the drum samples—which are the products being sold—are the most important aspect of my thesis project. The samples will be recorded with different microphones and techniques that are common in different styles of music. These samples will then be divided into "packs" of different samples based upon which genre they encapsulate the best; at a minimum, there will be three sample packs in the styles described below:

a) **"Old Nashville Sound" - Classic Country Pack**

These specific drum sounds will highlight what it means to be *truly* country, Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson style: cross-sticks, cowbells, and room mics galore. With the help of established country engineers Mills Logan (Toby Keith, Cole Swindell, Allison Moorer) and Gina Johnson (Chris Stapleton, Jason Isbell), this sample pack will combine the best of old and new country drums. Warm, defined snares (with and without brushes and cross-sticks), and multiple different hi-hat hits (both open and closed) will be included. "Country-style" drums (a la The Highwaymen's "Highwayman" and Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler") include kick drums with less high-end point and more low-end fullness, crispy and bright snares and cymbals, and reliance on using more room mics instead of close-miking each and every part of the kit to capture the "open" country sound. This pack will aim to record these genre-specific sounds, focusing on emphasizing the variety found in country music concerning the various types of cross-sticks, brushes, and high-hat drumming techniques and sounds commonly used in the genre.

b) **"'80s Thrash Metal" - Classic Metal Pack**

This sample pack will be reminiscent of drum sounds from the peak of metal in the '70s—made by bands such as Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, and Iron Maiden—into modern day's take on metal drumming—influenced by bands such as Meshuggah and Gojira. Double kick drums, extra sets of toms, a plethora of cymbals, and a gong will be included in this pack. Originally inspired by thrash metal like what's found in Metallica's early discography (*Master of Puppets* and *Ride the Lightning*) as well as more modern-day metal drumming (such as Periphery's *Periphery IV*), these drum sounds will focus on bright and aggressive snare and kick drum hits from a multitude of different kits—some will sound more bluesy, like with earlier metal bands like Black Sabbath, while others will lean toward more modern rock sounds, like with newer artists such as Gojira. Recording these metal-inspired sounds will be possible with the help of established engineer Matt Sepanic (Slipknot). The miking techniques for this pack will

focus largely on relying more on multiple close mics rather than an abundance of room mics as country music does. This will most likely be the largest and most comprehensive drum sample pack of the three due to the abundance of styles and techniques, both in terms of miking and drumming, found in the genre.

c) **"Decades of Pop" - Classic Pop Pack**

The third drum pack included in my collection will focus on capturing the best pop-rock drum sounds, inspired from a large range of the best pop artists from many different decades. With the help of engineer David Leonard (John Melloncamp, Prince), this pack will include recordings of bright and clean snares, rounded and defined kick drums, and crispy cymbals and hi-hats. Influences for this particular drum pack include classics such as Prince's *Prince* ("I Wanna Be Your Lover" and "Bambi"), Michael Jackson's *Thriller* ("Billie Jean" and "P.Y.T."), Toto's *Toto IV* ("Rosanna" and "We Made It"), and more modern pop albums, like Kacey Musgraves' *Golden Hour* ("Butterflies") and Hiatus Kaiyote's *Choose Your Weapon* ("Fingerprints," "Molasses," and "Shaolin Monk Motherfunk"). This pack will also include sounds such as a shaker and claps commonly found dotted across pop songs. This pack will utilize a blend of the miking techniques used when recording the other two packs.

2. *The Video Series*

Each video will serve as promotional content for each respective drum sample pack.

Each drum pack will have 2 corresponding videos. The first video will be between 5 and 10 minutes in length and serves to fully explain the recording process with splices of the engineer interviews between (loosely following the Toontrack Legacy of Rock drum sample kit promo video, [linked here](link)). The second video will be no longer than 90 seconds and will focus on the actual sounds of the samples the customer will receive in the pack; I intend to include loops of the drummer playing the kit in full in-studio as well as snippets of complete songs mixed with the samples in the pack. This shorter video should also be formatted to fit social media platforms such as Instagram for marketing.

Content for the videos will be shot during the recording sessions and also during an interview conducted in each respective engineers' own personal home studios. During the drum sample recording sessions in each studio, promotional video consisting of both interviews and b-roll will be recorded. Interviews will be shot in two parts: the first focusing on the engineers explaining the microphone techniques utilized during each respective session, and the second consisting of drummer Max Wiltse explaining his drum techniques for the respective style of music. Video of each engineer explaining their specific drum miking and mixing techniques will be captured in their respective home studios to provide a more intimate feel to the viewer/intended customer. Video of Max explaining his drumming techniques will be shot during the recording of the samples in the recording studio. B-roll will primarily consist of shots of the studio, drum setup, outboard gear, board, and engineers working in the studio.

3. *The Website*

The website will be used to sell the drum sample packs products as well as provide information to potential customers about each pack. There will be 5 main website pages and 3 subpages: a Home page, an About page, a Contact page, a Login page (this may change depending on the cost and difficulty of setting up user accounts with their corresponding purchases) and a general Products page with 3 subpages (each subpage corresponding to a sample pack).

The website's Home page will be an interactive picture of one of the drum kits from the recording sessions. Each drum in the kit will correspond to a different webpage as designated by a piece of labelled tape on the head of each drum; for example, hovering the mouse over the snare drum will cause the tape on it labelled with the word "About" to light up and, when clicked, will take the user to the About page. There will also be a traditional navigation bar in a header across the top of each webpage. I also plan on including a short piece (no longer than a few sentences) explaining the website's purpose, or possibly a short promo video of clips from the longer videos to give the viewer a general idea of what is being sold.

The About page will contain a short biography of who I am, as well as information about each of the engineers and musicians who are included in the project. There will be an emphasis

placed on how this project is essentially a small business based out of Nashville, Tennessee, created by hopeful college students who moved to Music City in order to pursue their passion projects.

The Contact page will have information about how to contact the company in case of any issues or questions. In addition to an email address, there will be a form for the user to fill out for easier contact.

The Login page (depending if it gets included in the website or not) will allow the user to login to their account and download their previously purchased products from the website. There will be lists of receipts, payment information, previous purchases, and the option to change the user's account information (such as email and password) under the Account Settings page, which the user will be directed to after logging in. The option to create an account will be given at the checkout point.

The general Products page will include three "pictures" of each product, each pack of which will be designed to look like a box with a picture that represents the sounds of the samples included "inside of" it (see Toontrack example below). This layout for the main product page will be simple, similar to the Massey Plugins Products page (see Massey page example below). Clicking on each picture will take the user to the specific product's subpage, which will include information about how each pack was recorded, a layout of the studio it was recorded in, product demos, the corresponding product video, and (most importantly) a link to purchase the sample pack.

From Toontrack's Legacy of Rock SDX product page (linked).
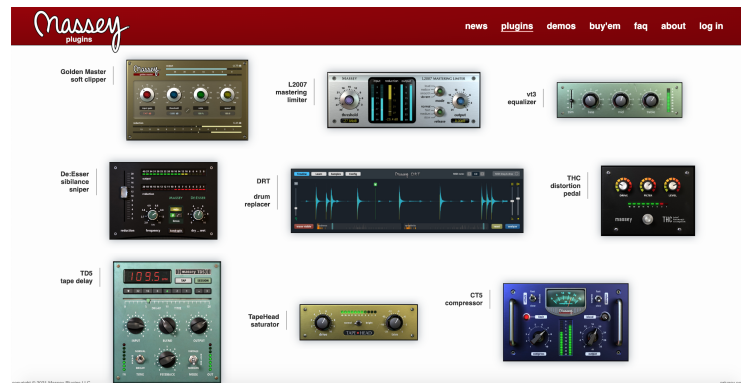
From Massey Plugins' general Product page (linked).

3. Critical Description Models

Below are two main models that influence the different aspects of my thesis project: the first is an annotation of a Steven Slate Audio drum pack and its subsequent marketing and website, and the second is a drum sample from my own personal library that I am planning on using as inspiration for other recordings. I've written my ideas on both the negative and positive qualities of each model to help me better plan to avoid issues that the models have and to include what they accomplish well in my own project.

Critical Description Model #1:

Steven Slate Drums - Terry Date Drums Expansion Pack (link): This pack of pre-recorded drum sounds—intended to be used in the mixing or production processes of a song by either placing the sampled sounds (such as an isolated kick drum sound) underneath those of a "real" drum kit to enhance what's already been recorded or to be used as sounds to program a drum loop—is extremely similar in its purposes, marketing, and distribution to what I aspire my project to be. This is an ideal model for my project (which will also be "packs" of sample drum sounds) because the marketing behind it is ideal for what I want to be producing for my final project: testimonials from a plethora of established engineers, a video (in this example, by engineer Terry Date) explaining their unique drum recording methods, and audio samples of the pack in use. Steven Slate Audio is known for its endorsements with celebrity engineers (such as Terry Date, listed here) and video demonstration series, both of which are elements I intend to include in my project. This is essentially the exact product I intend to create for my thesis project—product, marketing, website, et al.

- *Negatives:*
    - Packs are only available for use with Steven Slate products; packs are not universal products available for use by large range of people who don't own SS products → limited scope
    - Sloppily organized general website/product page; hard to navigate
- *Positives:*
    - Inclusion of video of engineer Terry Date explaining how recordings were created → recording information is present/easily available to the buyer
    - Broad selection of testimonials from other engineers/musicians/music industry professionals
    - Audio examples of pack provided through in-browser player (both mixed into songs and just the drum kit samples by themselves)

Critical Description Model #2:

Malcolm Springer's Kick Drum Sample, "Kick Zeela" (link): This is a kick drum sample that was given to me by one of my previous bosses, engineer Malcolm Springer, as part of a series of drum samples he had been collecting over the course of his career. I personally use this particular sample in almost every project that I work on that has any issues requiring a sample to be used with the kick drum; it has enough low-end that can fix problems with a "thin-sounding" kick drum when layered, while it also maintains a nice attack that can solve issues with lack of definition when placed under a bass drum with not enough mallet sound. This recording serves as an inspiration for what I would like to accomplish with my thesis project because it is a drum sample recording that is usable in multiple settings and scenarios to help solve a plethora of problems one might encounter with a kick drum while mixing.

- *Negatives:*
    - Rest of kit doesn't exist/unsure of recording practices → no way to include any recording information; also creates problem of not having one consistent kit that sometimes does not blend well with other samples from other drum kits because the recording difference is too obvious
- *Positives:*
    - Well recorded and generally versatile across genres (minus issue with lacking rest of drum kit)
    - Universal across platforms → .wav file that does not require use of a specific program to place samples, unlike Steven Slate and Toontrack products

4. Artist Statement

My dream of becoming a big-shot audio engineer/producer was what initially pulled me out to Nashville. I was fortunate enough to get my feet wet and to really solidify that audio engineering was what I wanted to pursue by helping start a district-wide series of student-led recording studios when I was in high school. Engineering and producing other students' music from sophomore year until high school graduation made me realize that I was going to be making a huge mistake if I didn't pursue audio somehow, and I am beyond grateful that matriculating to Belmont allowed me to take the first steps in making that dream come to fruition.

a) *Relevant Experience*

My experiences outside of the classroom also provide me with the necessary skill sets to accomplish my thesis project goals. I have had several internships with various engineers and studios around Nashville: my first studio internship was with Malcolm Springer, an engineer known for working with bands such as Fear Factory and Matchbox Twenty, for six months at his rented studio space at Universal's East Iris Studios in Nashville, where I learned how to work with rock bands on full-scale projects. These projects helped further my knowledge in the music industry, including working with budgeting, planning, and also—most importantly—learning how to effectively engineer sessions while Malcolm produced. I then began an internship with another engineer and my mentor, Mills Logan, who has currently hired me as an assistant to assist him with his Dolby Atmos mixes as well as with various tasks around his home studio, such as setting up Pro Tools sessions and mixing songs for him and his clients. Through one of the Dolby Atmos projects Mills allowed me to help him with, I was introduced to the metal band Megadeth and also their producer/engineer, Chris Rakestraw. Chris hired me to do some guitar editing on another metal band project, and then shortly afterwards hired me as an assistant engineer to work on Megadeth's upcoming record. It was through this experience that I learned how to quickly and efficiently edit in Pro Tools, a skill that's especially vital when it comes to working with drums. I am currently interning for class credit at Dark Horse Recording in Franklin, an opportunity that is furthering my knowledge of signal flow, microphone techniques, recording consoles, and how a recording session is run in general. All of these experiences have allowed me to hone in my skills and abilities while making valuable connections with professionals and highly skilled engineers alike, some of whom have become mentors and close friends of mine.

In addition to this, these various experiences have connected me with two studios that I plan to utilize during the drum sample recording process: Universal's East Iris Studio A in Nashville and Dark Horse Recording's The Lodge in Franklin. Studio A at East Iris Studios (formerly named the House of Blues Studios) is an especially important recording location because it contains one of Nashville's last stone rooms created by master acoustic designer Tom Hidley. These stone rooms are famous for their acoustical properties, especially the reverberation they create. Because of this studio space's high ceilings and stone walls, this is an ideal space to

record lively and reverberant drums, perfect for country music, which is heavily dependent upon using mics placed around the room to record the overall sounds of the kit in its space. This is one of the favorite rooms of one of my mentor engineers, Mills Logan, who primarily records country music. I am planning on bringing him in as an engineer on the project, specifically when we record drum samples at this location.

Tom Hidley "Stone Room" at Universal's East Iris Studio A (linked).

The Lodge studio space at Dark Horse Recording in Franklin is a drier (less reverberant) room with lower ceilings and a smaller overall square footage, which is better for drier, more precise drum sounds like those commonly found in metal music. I plan on using this studio to record drums for my metal drum pack with rock engineer Matt Sepanic, an instructor at the Dark Horse Institute, the school owned by the studio. Also, because I am an intern here, the studio space can be booked at no cost to me.

I am also requesting access to Studio A at Belmont-owned Ocean Way. This would be an ideal room to capture big-sounding recordings in because of its acoustical properties. This particular studio at the Ocean Way complex is world-famous for its live room, which is perfect for capturing "big rock and roll drum sound[s]" according to the studio's webpage, which is one of the reasons it would make an ideal recording room for my project. Not everyone has access to record drums in a studio like Ocean Way—I'll do it for them, and then sell them the product. This is where I am planning on recording my pop genre drum sample pack with Mills Logan and Gena Johnson.

b) *Relevant Coursework*

The classes I have taken and am planning to take at Belmont for completion of my double-major degree in both Audio Engineering Technology and Multimedia Production, a degree program that I created myself through the Individualized Plan of Study program, have and will continue to prepare me to tackle my present thesis project. Nathan Adam's **Intro to DAW (AET 2050)** class has had a very substantial impact on cementing my ability to be able to use Pro Tools for tracking, editing, and mixing audio. Additionally, classes such as **Audio Engineering I (AET 2090) and II (AET 2190)** have adequately prepared me for taking on the role of an engineer in a studio setting by granting me hands-on experience with signal flow, mixing consoles, and microphone techniques. The most important elements of these classes were the semester-long projects that consisted of having each student record and mix a song in Belmont's studios; in Audio Engineering I, we conducted this project with a group, but, in Audio Engineering II, this was an independent project, which truly strengthened my capability and confidence in myself as an audio engineer.

Classes such as **Principles of Web Page Design (ART 1700)**, **Intermediate Website Design (ART 2541)**, **Remote Video Production (MDS 2450)**, **Producing and Directing (MDS 4450)**, and **Intro to Digital Imaging (ART 1400)** that correspond to my Multimedia Production degree program will also help me accomplish my goals for my thesis project and beyond. Principles of Web Page Design, (which I am planning on taking during the fall 2021 semester, which is also when I am planning on completing the majority of the work for the website for my project.) and Intermediate Website Design will teach me the necessary skills in order to create a functional and aesthetically pleasing website to market my products. Remote Video Production and Producing and Directing will allow me to explore how to gather footage and edit it in order to create interesting and informative content for the video portion of my thesis project. Intro to Digital Imaging, a class I am in currently, is allowing me to sharpen my skills in graphic design softwares such as Adobe Photoshop, InDesign, and Illustrator, which will allow me to gain the skills necessary to create product design graphics to creatively depict my drum sample products.

5. Detailed Plan/Schedule

Below is a detailed plan of the proposed timeline for completion of my thesis project materials. I've included overall topics for each month (highlighted in green), Belmont's important dates (in gold), deadlines for completing specific aspects of the project (in red).

- **February 2021:**
  - *Feb. 23rd:* final proposal due to Honors Council (by 12:00 pm)

- **March 2021:** TEAM ASSEMBLY
  - *Mar., early:* receive feedback from Honors Council
    - if rejected, respond with appropriate edits and resubmit within one week
    - if accepted, continue with planned procedure
  - *Mar. 30th:* finish assembling core team needed to complete project (council members, engineers, musicians, editors, photographers, videographers)
    - Prospective council members: Nathan Adam, Matt Sepanic, Mills Logan
    - Prospective audio engineers: Matt Sepanic, Mills Logan, Michael Janas, David Leonard, Dave Hagen, Gena Johnson, Chris Rakestraw
    - Prospective musicians: Max Wiltse (drums)
    - Prospective editing/videography/photography team: Nathan Adam (videography), Grace Takacs (videography), Emily Johnson (photography), Kaitlin Lauda (photography), Beth Scott (photography)

- **April 2021:** PLANNING FOR CONTENT CREATION
  - *Apr., throughout:* work on completing planning due Apr. 30th
  - *Apr. 12th-20th:* break from project; Belmont spring semester 2021 final exams
  - *Apr. 30th:* complete preliminary planning for recording sessions; last day of classes for Belmont spring semester
    - book studio time in respective studios (Ocean Way Studio A, Dark Horse Recording's The Lodge, East Iris Studio A)
    - write input lists/acquire necessary equipment from engineers and friends (microphones, drum kits)
    - finalize schedule of engineers/videographers/photographers to be at specific recording sessions as they are booked
  - *Apr., last week of:* hold team meetings/check-ins for each prospective team; adjust next month's schedule accordingly

- **May 2021:** DRUM RECORDING
  - *May, throughout:* record drum samples at each studio depending on which dates have been booked at respective locations

- **June 2021:** DRUM FINALIZATION/BEGIN WRITTEN CONTENT
  - *Jun. 1st-26th:* begin creating written content (focus on product descriptions) for website based on drum sample recordings as they are recorded
  - *Jun. 1st-26th:* continue to record drum samples at each studio depending on which dates have been booked at respective locations
  - *Jun. 27th:* ALL TRACKING FOR DRUM SAMPLES DONE
  - *Jun. 28th-Jul. 3rd:* begin and complete mixes for drum sample packs that were recorded (select best takes, edit best takes into short sounds, mix sounds)
  - *Jun., last week of:* hold team meetings/check-ins for each prospective team; adjust next month's schedule accordingly

- **July 2021:** WRITTEN/VIDEO CONTENT CREATION
  - *Jul., throughout:* break for potential trip to Europe; month is subject to change
    - if cancelled, continue with plan for this month below
    - if confirmed, break from thesis project for the month (still have virtual team meetings?)
  - *Jul. 4th:* ALL DRUM SAMPLE PACKS COMPLETELY DONE
  - *Jul. 4th-11th:* continue writing drafts of written content based on mixed/edited drum sample recording packs
  - *Jul. 12th-23rd:* record extra content for videos (home studio biographies?); reshoot any content that may need to be redone (voice overs for studio session videos?)
  - *Jul., last week of:* hold team meetings/check-ins for each prospective team (virtual if in Europe); adjust next month's schedule accordingly

- **August 2021:** WRITTEN DESCRIPTION FINALIZATION
  - *Aug. 1st-11th:* finalize written content materials (product descriptions, brief biographies of engineers/testimonials)
  - *Aug. 12th:* ALL WRITTEN DESCRIPTIONS DONE
  - *Aug. 12th-20th:* videography content work time
    - if European trip was cancelled, use this extra time for more video editing
    - if European trip commences, use time to accomplish July tasks →
      - *record extra content for videos (home studio biographies); reshoot any content that may need to be redone (voice overs for studio session videos?)*
  - *Aug. 25th:* first day of classes for Belmont fall semester 2022

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- **September 2021:** <mark>VIDEOGRAPHY FINALIZATION</mark>
    - *Sep. 1st-16th:* continue to edit/finalize videos
    - *Sep. 4th-6th:* <mark>Labor Day weekend</mark>
    - *Sep. 17th:* <mark>ALL VIDEOS COMPLETELY DONE</mark>
    - *Sep. 18th-Sep. 30th:* draft plans for product graphic designs

- **October 2021:** <mark>GRAPHICS FINALIZATION</mark>
    - *Oct. 6th:* finalize drafts for product graphic designs
    - *Oct. 10th-16th:* break from project; <mark>Belmont fall semester 2021 midterm exams</mark>
    - *Oct. 17th-28th:* create product graphic designs from drafted plans
    - *Oct. 29th:* <mark>PRODUCT GRAPHIC DESIGNS DONE</mark>

- **November 2021:** <mark>WEBSITE CREATION PREPARATION</mark>
    - *Nov.* begin to plan website design; general layout, buy domain name, create account on platform (Wix.com) and link to domain name
    - *Nov. 24th-28th:* <mark>Belmont Thanksgiving Break 2021</mark>
    - *Nov. 29th:* website design layout finalized and created in Wix.com

- **December 2021:** <mark>WEBSITE CREATION CONTINUATION</mark>
    - *Dec. 7th-14th:* break from project; <mark>Belmont fall semester 2021 final exams</mark>
    - *Dec. 15th-Jan. 4th:* <mark>Belmont Winter Break 2021-2022</mark>
    - *Dec. 17th-24th:* import videos, pictures, products, descriptions into website; begin to fill out extra areas on website with necessary written content that may have not been completed earlier with previously written content

- **January 2022:** <mark>WEBSITE FINALIZATION</mark>
    - *Dec. 15th-Jan. 4th:* <mark>Belmont Winter Break 2021-2022</mark>
    - *Jan. 5th:* <mark>WEBSITE READY FOR LAUNCH/ENTIRELY DONE</mark>
    - *Jan. 6th-Feb. 3rd:* gather legal/business advice about launching business

- **February 2022:** <mark>EXTRA TIME ALLOWANCE</mark>
    - *Feb. 28th-Mar.4th:* break from project; <mark>Belmont spring semester 2022 midterm exams</mark>

- **March 2022:** <mark>REFLECTION WRITING/PRESENTATION & DEFENCE</mark>
    - *Feb. 28th-Mar.4th:* break; <mark>Belmont spring semester 2022 midterm exams</mark>
    - *Mar. 5th-12th:* write Artistic Reflection about process of creating project
    - *Mar. 13th:* <mark>ARTISTIC REFLECTION DONE</mark>
    - *Mar. 13th-19th:* <mark>Belmont Spring Break 2022</mark>
    - *Mar., date TBA:* defend finished thesis project in front of panel/audience

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