Effective Education Strategies for Proper Recycling

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The Situation

• Simply put, recycling “right” can be confusing

• Experiencing all-time high contamination rates between 14 to 40 percent

• Due to contamination, China has banned import of mixed paper and mixed bales of #3-7 plastics cutting off the key market for these materials

• Municipalities are having to try and find alternate international markets or further process materials for domestic markets
RECYCLING DATA
Recycling is Important to Most Americans

How important is it to you to recycle?

- Very important: 63%
- Somewhat important: 29%
- Not important: 5%
- Indifferent: 3%

- Residents with higher incomes and education and those with kids at home consider recycling of greater importance
Most Consider Themselves Good Recyclers

What kind of recycler are you?

- 47% I'm great at recycling
- 45% I'm okay at recycling
- 7% I'm terrible at recycling

In fact, of those who say recycling is important, 92% consider themselves great, while those who rate recycling somewhat important see room for improvement.
But There is Lots of Room for Improvement

How often, if ever, do you recycle each of the following items?

- Plastic bags
- Greasy pizza boxes
- Take-out containers
- Shredded paper

Always recycle:
- Plastic bags: 57%
- Greasy pizza boxes: 35%
- Take-out containers: 28%
- Shredded paper: 59%

Sometimes recycle:
- Plastic bags: 23%
- Greasy pizza boxes: 17%
- Take-out containers: 21%
- Shredded paper: 19%

Do not recycle:
- Plastic bags: 20%
- Greasy pizza boxes: 48%
- Take-out containers: 50%
- Shredded paper: 22%
And Even the Best Recyclers Need Help

Recycling is Very Important

- Plastic Bags: 69% Always, 15% Sometimes, 13% Never
- Pizza Boxes: 42% Always, 40% Sometimes, 18% Never
- Take out Containers: 40% Always, 22% Sometimes, 13% Never
- Shredded Paper: 73% Always, 14% Sometimes, 14% Never

Recycling is Somewhat Important

- Plastic Bags: 35% Always, 41% Sometimes, 24% Never
- Pizza Boxes: 22% Always, 54% Sometimes, 24% Never
- Take out Containers: 12% Always, 29% Sometimes, 60% Never
- Shredded Paper: 41% Always, 32% Sometimes, 27% Never
And Residents are Looking for Direction

*When in doubt, what do you do with an item ready to be disposed?*

- 31% throw it in the trash
- 24% put it in the recycling bin to let someone else sort it
- 32% look up what to do with it
- 13% ask someone else
GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT
Where do they look for info?

Consumers increasingly rely upon websites for answers to their recycling questions:

- 54% respondents rely on their city, county or recycling company’s website as the first or second choice source
- 52% respondents rely on Internet searches
- 36% percent of Americans say that they either seek out or are provided with recycling information from their local government.

And yet… a recent Recycling Partnership study found less than 41% of communities studied had recycling information on city websites.
Opportunities

• Provide clear and simple instruction
• Provide easy access to information
  • Meet consumers where they are
    - Online
      - Front and center on the respective program’s page
      - Search engine marketing/optimization
        • Use name of community and ‘recycling’ as the keywords
    - At the trash bin
    - Community events
    - Social content/advertising
  • Consider innovative ways to educate children
    - School content
    - Educational events
But...

- People see/hear 2,000-3,000 messages per day
- You only have 3-5 seconds to catch their attention

So...

- Keep it SIMPLE!
- Focus on what matters
CASE STUDIES
The Program: What is Recycle Often. Recycle Right?

Emphasize education:
- Act as a base for behavior change
- Set groundwork for feedback activities
- Focus on accepted items that are (almost) nationally universal
- Increase recycling of basic materials with value/markets
- Address contamination that causes the most issues

1. Recycle all my empty bottles, cans and paper.
2. Keep food and liquids out of my recycling.
Getting Back to the Basics of Recycling

• For the “Show Me” Segment
  • Use consistent basic recycling education tools

• For the “Help Me” Segment
  • Keep it simple
  • Focus on barriers and benefits
  • Tell people why
  • Ask for a commitment
  • Remind and prompt

• For the “Make Me” Segment
  • Use feedback levers to change behavior
The Goal: Feedback at the Cart

• Design cart tags to emphasize recycling right at home
  • Target the recycling myths: When in doubt, more than 24 percent of consumers put an item in the recycling bin anyway.

• Decrease contamination
  • Maintain behavior; form new recycling habits
Desired Behaviors

Focus on these three steps..

Let’s get back to the basics of recycling.

Remember these three rules each time you recycle:

1. Recycle all my empty bottles, cans, and paper.
2. Keep food and liquids out of my recycling.

And improve your recycling rates and decrease contamination....
Pilot Location

- WM identified a city about 35 miles outside of Chicago that was seeing high volumes of contamination
- City has support from key stakeholders to support a pilot to target contamination
- Population: almost 50% Hispanic
- Identified routes to test cart tagging
Strategy

Educate

Tag

Track
EDUCATE
Initial mailer sent to routes to notify tagging
Online Education

Recycle Often. Recycle Right. messaging on city website

Recycle Often. Recycle Right. Myth Page
Social Media Outreach

Videos on social media

Facebook ads within city’s zip codes
Positive and Negative Tags

- Important to reinforce good recycling habits
- Census data showed high Hispanic population – tags were transcreated from English to Spanish
Evolution of the tag

1. Today’s recycling grade: A+
   - Your actions are going a long way towards turning all of our waste into a resource for a brighter, more sustainable future.
   - To expand your recycling chops, visit RecycleOftenRecycleRight.com.
   - Thanks for recycling and keep up the good work!

2. Today’s recycling grade: C-
   - It’s time to rethink recycling.
   - We found some problem items in your recycling cart:
     - Recyclables bagged in plastic bags
     - Loose plastic bags
     - Raggie items (like soda left in the can)
     - Dirty items (like peanut butter jars)
     - Non-recyclable items (like garden hoses)
     - Other:
   - When in doubt, leave it out.
   - Address:
   - Extra:
   - Route:
   - Thanks for recycling and keep up the good work!

3. Today’s recycling grade: Needs Improvement
   - It’s time to rethink recycling.
   - We found some problem items in your recycling cart:
     - Recyclables bagged in plastic bags
     - Loose plastic bags
     - Glass
     - Raggie items (like soda left in the can)
     - Dirty items (like peanut butter jars)
     - Non-recyclable items (like garden hoses)
     - Other:
   - Recycling “right” can be confusing. But when the above items end up in your recycling, they can turn the entire load into trash. So when in doubt, leave it out.

4. Thanks for doing a great job recycling!
   - ¡Gracias por hacer un excelente trabajo con el reciclaje!
   - Your recycling looks great, and your actions are going a long way towards turning all of our waste into a resource for a brighter, more sustainable future.
   - Su reciclaje se ve excelente y sus acciones ayudan a convertir todos estos desechos en recursos para un futuro más brillante y sostenible.

5. Your recycling has garbage in it.
   - Hay basura en su reciclaje.
   - We found one or more of the following items:
     - Recyclables bagged in plastic bags
     - Raggie items (like soda left in the can)
     - Dirty items (like peanut butter jars)
     - Other:
   - When in doubt, leave it out.
   - Si tiene alguna duda, déjelo.

6. Contact Information:
   - Customer Service:
     - Service@WasteManagement.com
     - 866-947-7197
   - Your Waste Management Driver:
     - Su conductor de Waste Management:
     - [Name]
     - [Phone number]
   - [Address]
   - [Date]
   - [Signature]
Execute & Track

1. DRIVERS TAG
   Drivers used tags along their routes and identified problem carts using their cameras on the trucks and opened carts

2. SOCIAL NORMING
   Green tags indicate residents doing a good job and influence others to do the same

3. IDENTIFY REPEAT OFFENDERS
   Data shared with city allows conversations re: next-level consequences for the Make Me Group
Maintaining Behavior Change

EDUCATE, EDUCATE, EDUCATE
Communicate, Communicate, Communicate! Refresh content, create new community events, and continued to maximize social media

CELEBRATE SUCCESS!
Share results with all stakeholders – internal and external. Energize the team, get their insights and feedback – reducing contamination takes a village!
Behavior Change Results

**Results**
- Contamination reduction rates ranging between 20 - 40%

**Teamwork**
- Drivers, Route Managers, Dispatch, and more worked together - 7,000 carts tagged

**Education**
- Direct outreach to 15K HH by year end with RORR newsletter and poster in English and Spanish!

**Communication**
- Key city stakeholders, website, social media helped to share the educational messages
WASTE MANAGEMENT
ORGANICS
60% of all waste sent to the landfill contains food scraps, yard debris and food-soiled paper.

All of these materials are compostable and can easily be diverted from the landfill but the industry is seeing a lot of contamination.

Goal: shed light on the impact of non-organic contamination like plastic.
Keep Compost O’Natural!

Produce Sticker Trading Card was developed to educate customers on a main source of contamination found in compost, plastic stickers on produce.

Customers were prompted to fill up their card with produce stickers and then redeem it for a free bag of compost at the Cedar Grove landscape yards.
Keep Compost O’Natural!

3.6% response rate

1,600 cards redeemed by December 31, 2014

Many customers filled up the Trading Card that was mailed to them and then continued to put their stickers on cards they created.