

Background & Objective

The UK dumps more household waste into landfill than any other EU state, despite EU targets to reduce municipal waste sent to landfill by 50% by 2013. With landfill tax increasing by £8 per tonne a year and landfill space at a premium, it is imperative that consumers - unaware of the cost to the taxpayer and the environment of sending rubbish to landfill - increase their recycling efforts.

RecycleBank entered the UK market in 2009 and partnered with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) to introduce a programme that would motivate residents to recycle.

RecycleBank is a US company founded with the belief that environmental solutions create economic opportunities. The company operates a scheme that motivates people to become greener residents and smarter consumers by rewarding them for recycling at home. RecycleBank does this by quickly and easily measuring the amount each home recycles and then converting that activity into RecycleBank Points, which can be used at local and national reward partners including M&S, Coca-Cola, local shops, restaurants, leisure facilities, or donated to local schools.

This in itself is a major step change in the approach to waste management and resource recovery. Until this point UK policy had created a framework where penalty schemes were still widely under consideration whereas now, with the advent of RecycleBank, the emphasis is very much on recycling incentives.

RecycleBank embarked upon an intensive media relations campaign to launch the scheme and educate residents about the importance of recycling.

PR campaign objectives:

National

- Prove that ‘rewards for recycling’ works from an economic, social and environmental stand point.
- Attract advocates for the scheme from all political parties and involve residents, reward partners and environmental groups.
- Overcome preconceptions about ‘chips in bins’, consumerism and appropriateness to UK market.

Local

- Motivate residents to change their behaviour and increase their recycling rates, thus reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill and increasing the economic benefits which can be borne from re-used / recycled materials.
- Meet the publicity needs of the three core delivery partners during the launch phase: RecycleBank (reward facilitator), Veolia (waste collection provider) and the RBWM – public service provider.
- Increase recyclable material collected amongst participants by 25%.
- Host two successful launch events; 1. A trial taking place in autumn 2009 and 2. A full roll out commencing June 2010.

Creative Concept

The PR campaign set out to tap into the hearts and minds of ‘wasteful’ householders through simple and direct messaging:

- Focus on the business innovation of bringing together an environmental and sustainability issue (recycling), with a rewards programme (RecycleBank). Creative message ‘carrot-not-the-stick’ was heavily used throughout all PR material.
- RBWM positioned as the ‘first to market’ local authority and ‘hero’ of the campaign.

- All press statements used 'win-win-win for all' message – demonstrating the strong benefits for the environment, participants, and partners.
- Incentive-led message - used third parties such as M&S to highlight the value of the rewards and offset concerns – led by the Daily Mail – about the use of 'chips in bins'. Both RecycleBank, and other mooted bin tax schemes, rely on such technology, so this was potentially a major area of concern.
- Used M&S closed loop example to demonstrate how recyclables, such as an M&S milk bottle bought in Windsor can be consumed and recycled by a RBWM resident, collected by a recycling vehicle, RecycleBank points received for recycling, carton processed at Closed Loop recycling (Dagenham) into food grade plastic then re-manufactured by M&S to produce a new milk carton for sale in M&S Windsor and bought by a customer with a RecycleBank reward voucher... and so the cycle continues.
- Formulated a credible, yet fairly conservative, average headline figure to demonstrate the household benefits in monetary terms (£135 per annum).

Strategy & Media Implementation

A segmented media strategy comprised:

- Use of residents and reward partners to communicate messages through the media – trusting in the word of mouth and people's genuine experiences of the scheme.
- Two community-based media launch events. The trial launch event was held in a residential street showing the scheme working in action and the roll out in a high footfall retail environment.
- No celebrity endorsements. The scheme was about making the community the focus of attention.
- No use of advertising due to budgetary constraints.

Trial launch preparation:

- Collated a press pack (on FSC approved wooden USB sticks) including all stakeholders and segmented versions of the launch release.
- Broadcast quality tape produced of the collection process in the US to give broadcasters footage before the scheme was up and running in the UK.
- Sell-in of the press call to secure journalist attendance.
- Spokespeople briefed prior to the launch. Media briefing sheets devised to pre-empt difficult questions and provide adequate responses.
- Produced props (inflatable Earth balloons, signage, badges, sample vouchers) for the photo call.
- Secured the involvement of a guest VIP – Theresa May – then Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, plus the local MP for Maidenhead.

Trial launch day (autumn 09):

- Issued the launch release to all correspondents and newswires to ensure maximum pick-up. Telephone follow up to key contacts from a media list of over 200 journalists.
- Management of photo call & interviews at the launch event, via phone and broadcast studios.
- Video filming and photography coordinated of the entire launch day comprising all interviews and footage of the very first 'blue bin' collection service for use throughout the future PR campaign.

Post trial launch:

- Case studies with householders, reward partners and local residents.
- Media visits with residents and local businesses.
- 'Milestone' announcements to confirm activation and redemption levels to communicate the success of the scheme.
- Hammered home the 'earn and burn' message.

Roll out launch (summer 2010):

- A high impact press conference focussed on profiling the resident benefits – the rewards.
- Hosted in a historical high footfall shopping centre near local reward partners.
- Political representatives were secured including MP Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Environment Secretary MP Caroline Spelman and MP for Windsor, Adam Afriyie.
- 'Basket of rewards' from key local partners compiled for the photo shoot.

Target Audience

National

- Government ministers – environment and local communities
- Local authorities across the UK
 - Environment Officers
 - Local MPs
 - Councillors for Sustainability / Environment
- Materials recycling and waste management professionals
- Environmental professionals
- New and existing national reward partners
 - Business owners
 - CSR managers
 - Promotions managers
- Media – print, online and broadcast
 - National environmental correspondents
 - Trade

Local

- Householders within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead:
 - Population 142,600
 - Households 61,500
- New and existing local reward partners
 - Business owners
 - CSR managers
 - Promotions managers
- Local print and broadcast media

Materials Used

The campaign focussed on optimising media relations to communicate the benefits of the scheme and engaging residents to recycle.

- PR releases and images: All PR material was communicated to the media electronically, avoiding the use of paper and ink.
- Press packs: Materials downloaded onto reusable Nature USB Flash drives instead of printing. The USB sticks were made from European Maple natural hardwood shell from an FSC certified source.
- RecycleBank UK offices: In line with company ethos and brand values, RecycleBank sought to locate its new UK offices in an environmentally sustainable space. The new office in London has;
 - o green roof terrace - Green Roofs
 - o Solar Heating
 - o Rainwater harvesting (flushing toilets and irrigating green roof)
 - o Water conservation (smaller cisterns and flow restrictors)
 - o Wind Turbine (powering irrigation)
 - o Sensor lighting (to all offices and common parts)
 - o Low energy lighting
 - o Recycling on each floor (paper, plastic, cans, food (wormery))
 - o Bike storage (healthier than the Tube)
 - o Recycled materials (such as flooring made from car tyres)
- Basket of rewards: All items returned to partners or donated to residents.

Following the trial launch, the scheme was catapulted into the media spotlight securing extensive local and national media coverage including BBC Working Lunch and BBC Radio 4, The Today Programme. This created high brand awareness with residents and resulted in 71% of the eligible **households activating their accounts**.

The roll out in June 2010 continued to generate national media interest with coverage across ITV, BBC News 24 and BBC 1 News throughout the day, and Channel 4 Tonight. Moreover, despite being an intentionally apolitical initiative, it has won over support from PM David Cameron, Chancellor George Osborne MP and London Mayor

Boris Johnson – and is even credited in Conservative party policy announcements and more recent government coalition agreement on the environment. Proof enough that effective PR can change perceptions and the habits of a lifetime, as well as putting money back into the pockets of taxpayers.

Diverting Waste and earning rewards

- Trial: 60% of the households activated their account (10 months)
- Trial: 35% increase in recycling rate (tonnages diverted from landfill)
- Roll out: 64% of households currently offered RecycleBank programme (total HHs 23,804) have activated their account after just 4 months
- 14.6 million RecycleBank Points earned by residents
- 21,413 rewards ordered (M&S vouchers most popular) since the start of the programme
- Over 25 local authorities declared an interest in the scheme and are keeping a watching brief. The business expects to double the number of members by December 2010.
- Boyne Hill Primary School has received a £1,250 grant to develop a sustainable garden for year 1 pupils, thanks to residents donating their points to the RecycleBank Green Schools Programme.
- Over the next 5 years, RecycleBank estimates that it will have diverted 15,000 tonnes from landfill.
- Halton Borough Council (Cheshire) has become the second local authority to adopt RecycleBank. RecycleBank has been rolled out to the entire borough following a successful trial where recycling increased by 60% in weight collected.

Media Coverage (October 2009 – September 2010):

- 594 pieces (90% positive coverage)
- 105 broadcast items (49 national / regional TV; 56 national / regional radio)
- £1,158,297 AVE
- Audience reach: 1,199,825,853 (1.2 billion)

With no budget for advertising or mass direct mails, the PR campaign was the pivotal communication tool. By segmenting the message and profiling key milestones and achievements, the campaign achieved 26:1 return on investment.

Judges thoughts:

Judges thought that this campaign demonstrated the widest media coverage, not only through PR activities but also through word of mouth publicity. The campaign's strategy to use incentives and rewards demonstrated positive motivation, thus encouraging people to recycle more.