

Introduction of mixed plastics to kerbside collections in Braintree

Introduction

In Spring 2007 Braintree District Council introduced the recycling of mixed plastics via its existing kerbside collections. A communications campaign was devised to inform their residents of the change in service and how to participate in the improved recycling scheme. This 'Fantastic Plastic' campaign formed part of a wider behavioural change campaign.

Key Facts

- Fantastic Plastic campaign helped to boost recycling rates and numbers of committed recyclers.
- Novel methods including a SMS text reminder service proved popular.
- The campaign took place during 2007.
- Campaign funding was £21,500 excluding staff time.
- Cost per household was £0.43.

About Braintree

- Braintree in north east Essex is a semi-rural area with three main market towns (Braintree, Witham and Halstead) and 60 rural parishes.
- Braintree District Council is a Waste Collection Authority and works closely with Essex County Council, the Waste Disposal Authority.
- Braintree District Council is responsible for an area of 61,000 hectares.
- The area has a population of 139,000 in 59,000 households.

Background to campaign

Waste and recycling services in the district are provided in-house with an annual budget of £3 million. Sorting and reprocessing of materials is outsourced to the private sector.

Alternate week refuse collections using 180-litre wheeled bins were introduced to 10,000 properties in October 2000 and rolled out to a further 40,000 properties in 2003 and 2006. The remaining properties were mostly rural and retained a weekly black sack service. The alternate weekly service includes a wheeled bin collection of garden and compostable kitchen waste.



All properties receive a fortnightly kerbside collection of dry recyclables. These are partially separated at source and collected in clear plastic sacks provided by the council. Commingled materials are bulked and transferred to a private sector materials recovery facility (MRF). Newspaper and magazines are kept separate and delivered direct to a reprocessor. Kerbside collections include aerosols, cans, foil, plastic bottles, paper and cardboard. Glass and textiles are collected through an extensive system of bring banks and delivered to local reprocessors.

For many years residents had asked for mixed plastics collections and found it hard to understand why the scheme was restricted to plastic bottles. The lack of a more comprehensive service was seen as one of the main reasons why residents were not fully satisfied with the scheme. In addition, plastic packaging was the largest component of residual waste by volume and contributed to a recurring side waste problem in some areas. Early in 2007 Braintree DC negotiated with its MRF operator to accept mixed plastics and received appropriate assurances. The council embarked on a communications campaign to ensure that residents were aware of the change in service and how to use the improved recycling scheme.

Communication objectives

The aims of the campaign included to:

- support the roll out of mixed plastic collections across the district during spring 2007 ensuring good awareness, understanding and take-up of the service;
- maintain high participation in general in recycling services during the course of the project, using the introduction of mixed plastics collections to generate interest in recycling; and
- respond to the public demand for more recycling facilities.

Approach

Following a successful WRAP-funded communication campaign during 2004–2006, Braintree DC had adopted the 'Recycle Now' brand for all its recycling communication materials. This allowed the project team to quickly and efficiently make use of national campaign materials, tap into national events (e.g. Recycle Now Week) and benefit from the growing recognition of the brand.

Fantastic Plastic was a multi-media communications campaign supporting the introduction of mixed plastic collections. It was delivered through a combination of newsletters, bin hangers, roadshows, adverts and articles in local newspapers, community group talks, in-store point-of-sale materials, mobile billboards, a text service and Bluetooth reminders.

Newsletters

Newsletters – the preferred communications channel during the earlier campaign – provided a good platform from which to launch and gain feedback on Fantastic Plastic. The council adopted a template style which gave the communications team the ability to change and mix the messages and tone of voice as the campaign developed.

The quarterly A5 format proved popular with residents. Data gathered through committed recycler surveys indicated high user recognition and the number of enquiries about recycling rose following the delivery of the newsletters.



Recycling Roadshows

Find out how you can recycle more. Come along and meet the recycling team at a summer roadshow.

recycle for your community

Tuesday 5th June 2007
World Environment Day
Weavers Park, Braintree
10.00am - 5.00pm

Wednesday 6th June 2007
George Yard, Braintree
9.30am - 5.00pm

Saturday 7th July 2007
Great Notley Garden Village Fete
1.00pm - 5.00pm

Saturday 21st July 2007
Coggeshall Carnival and Fete
1.30pm - 5.00pm

Saturday 1st September 2007
Gasfield Scarecrow Festival

Sunday 2nd September 2007
Gasfield Scarecrow Festival

Saturday 13th October 2007
Cressing Temple Barns
10.30am - 5.00pm

Sunday 14th October 2007
Cressing Temple Barns
9.30am - 5.00pm

Braintree District Council
transform something today

Tel: 01376 552525 for further information

Roadshows

Roadshows visited a number of small communities as well as major town centres and promotional events, using an advertising trailer to provide a high visibility presence in the campaign area. As well as providing direct opportunities to see and engage with recycling team members, roadshows helped generate wider press coverage for the Fantastic Plastic campaign.

The campaign delivered 19 road shows, nine school visits and three community talks, giving an opportunities-to-see (OTS) figure of 69,377 people, engaging with 3,162 residents face-to-face.

Point-of-sale materials

Shops ran a promotional campaign, putting stickers on recyclable materials and installing shelf wobblers, entry way banners and posters. As well as providing a good opportunity to promote the scheme while residents were shopping, the campaign linked purchase decisions with a reminder of disposal options. This had the dual benefit of raising awareness away from home and potentially influencing residents' purchasing behaviour in favour of recyclable materials.

SMS text service

Initially piloted for a single round to provide recycling service reminders and notifications, this novel cost-effective and low cost (0.01p per text) communication method was gradually extended to cover the entire project area. Another innovation trialled during the campaign was a mobile billboard display unit mounted on a trike equipped with Bluetooth technology. The trike sent recycling reminder pictures and texts to activated mobile phones in its vicinity and was particularly useful in reaching Braintree's commuters – a known 'hard-to-reach' group.

Results/Conclusion

Although the Fantastic Plastic sub-campaign itself was not monitored directly, the increases in participation rate over the course of the main campaign (6.1% increase in areas without any other service changes) can be viewed very positively. Similarly a 30% increase in the numbers of committed recyclers was seen in the same areas.

During the Fantastic Plastic campaign, recognition of the newsletters increased from 36% pre-campaign to 58% post-campaign. Of the 11,952 residents engaged during the campaign, 90.2% recalled the newsletters and 84.6% liked them and found them useful.

The 18% take-up rate for the text service was encouraging and service monitoring showed missed bin reports over bank holidays had fallen by a third year-on-year.

The campaign was well received by residents and retailers, and had an immediate impact on residents using the new collection stream. On the strength and success of the Fantastic Plastic campaign other Essex local authorities including Basildon, Epping Forest and Uttlesford have picked up on the campaign style and original artwork.

Key Learning Points

- The campaign had high exposure – every opportunity to present Fantastic Plastic was utilised, giving the impression it was absolutely everywhere!
- No national campaign material stream icon was available to cover mixed plastic. One was therefore designed in-house and approved by WRAP. The decision to call it ‘plastic packaging’ helped the public recognise what kind of plastic could be accepted.
- Residents already familiar with the national ‘Recycle Now’ and local campaigns responded well to a new call to action message being incorporated into the campaign. The campaign imagery was consistent throughout giving the same simple message across all elements.
- Use of the newsletters as the main ‘tried and tested’ platform for the campaign ensured a widespread understanding of the service change over a relatively short period.
- Fantastic Plastic was a good news story and quickly spread by word of mouth. The use of roadshows and other face-to-face opportunities to trigger this dialogue in the community was invaluable.
- Use of the novel ICT-based communication channels of SMS and Bluetooth helped reach population segments previously considered to be hard-to-reach using more traditional techniques.
- Moving from a simple message of ‘plastic bottles only’ to the more complex definitions associated with plastic packaging created difficulties. Definitions of what packaging could and could not be included had to be simplified for the campaign. However, this led to an increase in customer enquiries and continued dialogue with the reprocessor to clarify the acceptability of some types and forms of plastic packaging. It was recognised that the communication campaign could not be expected to satisfy all information needs and had to be backed up with a more personal service to customers.

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