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**Final Report**

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# London 2012 Legacy Transfer Report: Recycling Communications



London 2012 commercial partner case study: McDonald's sustainability messaging and communications

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**Written by:** BioRegional



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**Front cover photography:** Recyclable, compostable and non-recyclable waste bins at World Square McDonald's, showing the Games-specific recycling icons and bespoke packaging diagrams

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# Executive summary

This case study was written as part of WRAP's support for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and contributes to LOCOG's learning legacy objectives. LOCOG aims to have a record of lessons and best practice, and tools to improve the future performance of the UK events industry and its supply chain.

This document focuses on recycling communications and messaging carried out by McDonald's, worldwide sponsor of the Games and the only branded caterer in 2012 venues. Messaging took place at their four restaurants in the Olympic Park, outlining the messaging used, challenges faced and lessons learned.

All McDonald's packaging used on-pack recycling labels (OPRLs) complying with the WRAP / LOCOG variant of the national OPRL scheme. A three-bin waste system was adopted in restaurants using the corresponding recycling icons and colours, supplemented by bespoke diagrams of packaging. Some recycling stations used additional anti-littering iconography. An environmental themed banner reminded consumers to place waste in the correct bin. At 'back of house', lists on the wall informed staff of the correct bin for pre-consumer packaging.

The 'best' staff were picked from restaurants throughout the UK to work at London 2012 and given Games-specific recycling training. This equipped them to use the waste system correctly and inform consumers on the restaurant floor which bin to use.

Various lessons were learnt about the recycling messaging. McDonald's felt that the packaging recycling labels with corresponding logos on bins worked well, though icons could have been more prominent. They also believe that bespoke packaging diagrams on bins were effective; however the multiplicity of diagrams and misfit with generic diagrams in the wider park may have confused some consumers. Use of anti-littering logos could also be considered a dual message and hence confusing, although McDonald's were comfortable that it complemented the event-specific recycling messages. Written lists above bins at 'back of house' were removed during games time to simplify messaging to staff, leaving just the recycling icons.

Despite the communications used, segregation levels by consumers and staff at the bins was insufficient to meet LOCOG's recycling target. Additional hand sorting was undertaken by McDonald's staff in a dedicated sorting room before passing on to the event waste contractor.

McDonald's believe that for waste systems - the simpler, the better; stating a preference for keeping the number of waste streams to a minimum. However, this can impact the quality and quantity of recycling achievable due to the greater variety of materials co-mingled together, and the approach does not contribute to informing consumer behaviour change.

By using a competition to select the best staff and providing event-specific recycling training, McDonald's ensured games staff were enthusiastic and informed about the event recycling system; however they did not engage with consumers on the restaurant floor as much as hoped, due to the restaurants being busier than expected.

In terms of preparation for a major event, McDonald's would recommend engaging event organisers early-on with respect to any packaging and labelling requirements. This is to ensure there is sufficient time to develop any new packaging material required for the event-specific waste system, and on-pack artwork can be signed-off in good time.

McDonald's did not actively seek to gain business benefit from the recycling messaging aspect of their sponsorship. A high profile of recycling messaging was undesirable due to lack of immediate ability for rolling recycling out across the business. This would require tackling European-wide company policy and procurement systems, which operate in a variety of different national waste models.

However McDonald's do recognise that there is a consumer appreciation of recycling, and would support a statutory standard for a national recycling system in the UK.

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# Glossary

BOH	Back of house – this refers to staff-only areas at venues
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
FOH	Front of house – this refers to areas where the public could go at venues
LOCOG	London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games

# Acknowledgements

The project team, LOCOG and WRAP would like to thank Helen McFarlane (Environment Consultant, McDonald’s) for her insights provided.

## 1. Introduction

This case study was written as part of WRAP's support for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and contributes to LOCOG's learning legacy objectives. LOCOG aims to have a record of lessons and best practice, and tools to improve the future performance of the UK events industry and its supply chain.

This document focuses on recycling communications and messaging carried out by McDonald's, worldwide sponsor of the Games and the only branded caterer in 2012 venues. Messaging took place at their four restaurants in the Olympic Park, outlining the messaging used, challenges faced and lessons learned.

### 1.1 The context

Since 2008, McDonald's has been conducting research to measure general public attitudes towards its environmental initiatives, communications and general corporate branding. During this time it has seen a growth in positive opinion. Talking about where food comes from and how it's made is the best scoring for increased trust. Some environmental initiatives, including recycling, are gaining momentum. However, people appear to have minimal levels of awareness of biodiesel, zero waste to landfill and green energy <sup>1</sup>.

The only items currently recycled at McDonald's UK restaurants are non-consumer items such as used cooking oil, cardboard from pre-cooked food and kitchen milk bottles. Recycling during the London 2012 Games required a very different approach. LOCOG's Games-time waste programme required that waste facilities in McDonald's restaurants, both in public and staff-only areas followed the three bin waste streaming system. Targets were 'zero waste direct to landfill' and '70% of waste to be reused, recycled or composted'<sup>2</sup>. In practice this meant new packaging materials needed to be developed that would be suitable for LOCOG specifications for the compostable and recyclable waste streams.

The recycling messaging undertaken during the Games was focussed on communicating the required recycling system to customers and staff. This marketing communication activity took place within the four temporary restaurants that had been set up within the Olympic Park:

- World Square Restaurant – world's largest McDonald's (seating 1,500)
- Orbit Circus Restaurant (takeaway only)
- Media Centre Restaurant (takeaway only)
- Athletes' Village Restaurant (takeaway only)

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<sup>1</sup> Interview, Helen McFarlane, Environmental Manager, November 2012

<sup>2</sup> The general use of the term 'recycling' here includes reference to composted waste.

## 2. Summary of marketing communications activities

**Error! Reference source not found.** summarises McDonald's recycling communications initiatives for the London 2012 Games, covering both front of house (FOH)<sup>3</sup> and back of house (BOH)<sup>4</sup>. The mediums used were labelling on packaging and signage for bins - adhering to LOCOG stipulations and hence broadly consistent with the rest of the Olympic Park - as well as additional staff training.

Other messaging channels used by McDonald's mentioned some of their non-consumer recycling initiatives; however these general campaigns were not targeted at improving Games-time recycling and behaviour, for example the A to Z television campaign profiling the use of cooking oil to fuel vehicles. McDonald's standard restaurant "environment leaflet" was also distributed at the World Square and Orbit Circus restaurants (20,000 copies printed). However, this makes no reference to the Games-specific recycling system, mentioning waste only in the context of avoiding litter.

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<sup>3</sup> Referring to public areas.

<sup>4</sup> Referring to areas accessible to staff only

**Table 1** Summary of McDonald's London 2012 recycling messaging

Initiative	Summary
On-pack labels	<p>In line with other catering packaging at the Games, McDonald's packaging included an 'On-Pack Recycling Label' (OPRL) complying with LOCOG's London 2012 variant of the WRAP national OPRL scheme<sup>5</sup>. The colour and wording of packaging labels matched those of the bin types available during games time (recyclable, compostable or non-recyclable).</p> <p>These labels were placed on McDonald's consumer-facing and transport packaging<sup>6</sup>, to guide staff at BOH to separate waste into the correct bin.</p>
Labelling of bins and recycling stations in restaurants	<p>Like packaging, both consumer (FOH) and kitchen (BOH) recycling stations used icons and colours consistent with the Games-specific OPRL scheme.</p> <p>McDonald's restaurant recycling stations differed from those on the rest of the park and venues by having bespoke diagrams of McDonald's packaging rather than the generic types of depicted elsewhere.</p> <p>Above some of the recycling stations in the World Square restaurant there were 'stick-man' depictions of a man throwing litter in a bin. These are a standard design used for bins at all McDonald's restaurants across Europe.</p> <p>Portable litter carts outside World Square sported the Tidy Man symbol, incorporating the wording "Love Where You Live" in line with Keep Britain Tidy's new anti-littering campaign, as well as the Games-specific recycling symbols.</p> <p>At BOH in all restaurants, the signs above recycling stations included Games-specific logos corresponding with the recycling system and a written list of packaging products suitable for each of the three waste streams, alongside diagrams of the specific packaging being used. These same signs were replicated in the "sorting rooms" at the back of all four restaurants, where consumer and kitchen waste was double checked and hand-sorted by staff to be in compliance with LOCOG's waste targets.</p>
Staff	<p>McDonald's employed 500 Games-time staff. They received online training, supported by face-to-face training at venue restaurants. A hard copy Manager's Guide was produced as reference material for each restaurant team.</p>

<sup>5</sup> OPRL is a long-standing national scheme initiated by the British Retail Consortium and WRAP.

<sup>6</sup> This term is used by McDonald's to refer to intermediary pre-consumer packaging for pre-cooked food arriving into the kitchens.

	<p>Staff training included the waste management obligations of LOCOG’s recycling requirements, as adopted by McDonald’s. This ensured staff members were informed about how waste was to be segregated.</p> <p>Staff members were posted near recycling stations on the restaurant floor to clarify to consumers which bin they should use and to answer any questions.</p>
Sustainability banners in restaurants	<p>In the World Square restaurant, full-height vertical banners included the following message about recycling, located at the end of a longer message containing wider environmental themes:  “Help us to do our bit for the environment – look out for the recycling icons on our packaging and please put it in the right bin.”</p>

### 3. Lessons learned

The following section presents the lessons learned from Games-time recycling messaging, based on interviews with McDonald's environmental consultant and LOCOG's Corporate Sustainability Manager. McDonald's did not undertake any formal measurement of the coverage or impact of their recycling messaging; hence the majority of the information presented is based on qualitative experience during the Games.

#### 3.1 Recycling messaging on packaging

Anecdotally, McDonald's felt that the WRAP / LOCOG on-pack recycling labels worked well, providing clarity on the correct disposal option for each type of packaging. In hindsight, it was felt that their logos could have been made more prominent (i.e. bigger and with brighter colours). Figure 1 shows examples of the Games-specific OPRLs.

**Figure 1** Examples of McDonald's packaging showing the Games-specific OPRL

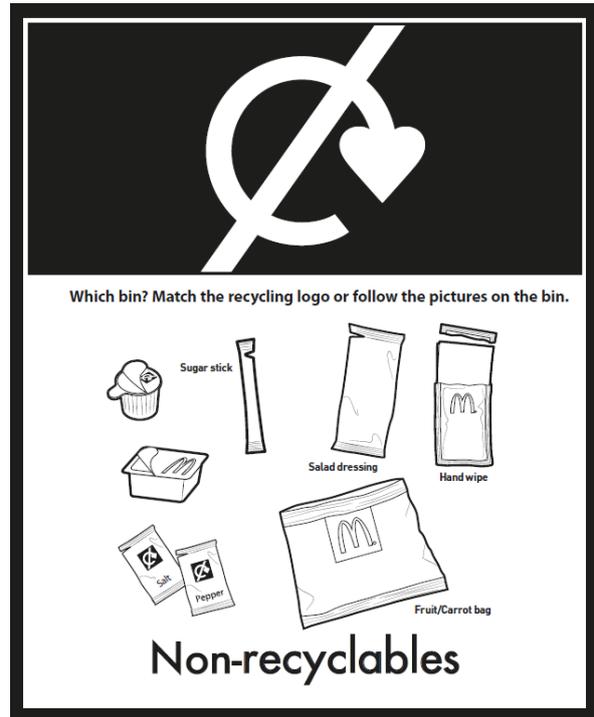
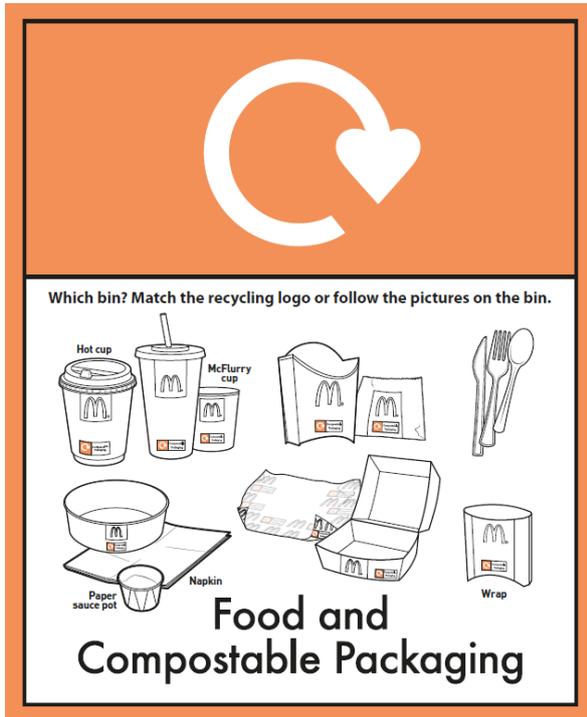


#### 3.2 Recycling messaging on bins

McDonald's felt that the bin recycling messaging was successful in terms of the use of clear icons and colours corresponding to packaging labels. The inclusion of additional bespoke diagrams (see figure 2), alongside the symbols matching the OPRLs, ensured that the labels catered for a wide range of individuals. However, some may have found this confusing due to the multiplicity of diagrams.

For customers who took food beyond the perimeters of the McDonald's restaurant, the standardised bin icons and colours remained the same as on their packaging, but the diagrams became more generic.

**Figure 2** Close-up of McDonald's bin labels for the three waste streams, showing recycling icons matching Games-specific OPRL and bespoke packaging diagrams.



McDonald's advocate that the simpler and easier a recycling system is to understand by customers and staff, the more effective it is likely to be. This is based on the experience from their restaurants, where people are often found to lose patience at the waste disposal point even without a segregated waste system, particularly where one person is responsible for disposing of a group's waste, e.g. a family.

The signage and diagrams used at recycling stations in kitchens was initially accompanied by a written list of all items suitable for each waste stream, alongside the diagrams. However, these were quickly deemed too long and impractical for staff under time pressure. Hence they were removed leaving just the symbols and packaging diagrams. Whilst this may have reduced the burden of reading a detailed list, it is likely to have impacted negatively on quality of segregation at the bin.

Neither the waste segregation rate of consumers nor staff in the kitchens was high enough to allow waste to be sent directly to waste contractors. In anticipation of this, McDonald's had created dedicated waste sorting rooms at the back of restaurants – see figure 3. Hence compliance with LOCOG's required recycling rates is likely to have been as much attributable to the secondary checks carried out, as the communications messaging used.

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**Figure 3** A member of staff hand-sorting waste in a sorting room



McDonald's support LOCOG's chosen waste system, recommending a maximum of two recycling streams (plus non-recyclables stream) as optimum to facilitate consumer and staff choices when at a recycling station. The more waste choices available and accompanying messaging used, the greater the likelihood of reduced separation rates because of confusion among customers and staff.

However, depending on the materials being handled, minimising the number of streams can result in lower quality recyclate due to contamination from other items, and also impact on the quantity of recyclate recovered, where contaminated waste is rejected.

McDonald's could have simplified messaging further by removing the traditional anti-litter messages with the Keep Britain Tidy man. The combination of 'anti-litter' with 'recycling' messaging can be viewed as unhelpful, as the former focusses on simply putting litter in the bin, whereas the latter encourages people to think first about which one to use.

However, McDonald's view is that the overall message is coherent – avoid littering, locate recycling stations and then choose the correct bin. Future events may wish to consider how to refine these approaches to a single simple system, giving consideration to minimising the number of icons and wording. Figures 4 and 5 show examples of event-specific recycling messaging being used alongside anti-litter messaging.

**Figure 4** McDonald's standard European anti-litter stick man icon being used alongside event-specific recycling messaging



**Figure 5** Keep Britain Tidy's "Love Where You Live" branding being used alongside event-specific recycling messaging on litter carts outside World Square restaurant, plus detail.



### 3.3 Staff as ambassadors of the recycling message

Staff members were trained in how to recycle correctly at the Games, LOCOG's recycling objectives and consumer engagement around recycling. Unlike other catering outlets, McDonald's Games staff were permanent, selected from restaurants across the UK by means of a competition. This meant training could start from a high baseline and focus on Games-specific issues. The competition ensured the best performing staff were recruited and that motivation and productivity would be high. This was reinforced with perks such as extra pay, tickets to Olympic events, a mobile phone, visits to London attractions and a party at the end of each 10 day shift. All of these elements improved overall enthusiasm and engagement.

It has been suggested that this motivational benefit extended to the recycling aspect of the staff role, although with no specific rewards dedicated to supporting recycling improvements, it is difficult to substantiate this.

Furthermore, restaurants experienced a larger volume of business than expected during the Games, so there was added pressure on staff. It appears this may have impacted on their ability to support consumer recycling in the way they had intended.

Future events may wish to consider providing staff with specific incentives around supporting the targeted environmental behaviours, such as recycling, to ensure these remain high on their agenda even under time pressures.

### 3.4 Lessons on preparation timing

An important lesson learned by McDonald's was the need to seek clarification of the event organiser's requirements early on. It applied mainly to the challenge of meeting LOCOG's packaging specifications, and the messaging (OPRL and bin), as artwork could not be signed off until specifications had been approved. For example, if an item of packaging was failed to meet the required certification, the alternative solutions may only be suitable for a different waste stream e.g. 'compostable' changes to 'recyclable', hence this would affect the packaging logo used and bespoke bin diagrams.

Substantial work was required to achieve simple bespoke diagrams on bins. New packaging materials were developed, mainly developing compostable items that had previously been plastic. This was to ensure a single waste stream per item. For example, one innovation was to introduce a compostable McFlurry straw so the cup, lid and straw could all be recycled in the compostable bin as a single piece of waste. This made it simpler for both consumers and staff as less segregation was necessary and pictures made it easier for them to know what to do. Figure 2 shows the McFlurry cup, lid and straw on the compostable bin sign, and the smoothie cup, lid and straw on a recyclable bin sign.

Sponsors and caterers at future events need to ensure they do not underestimate the time needed to ensure they are able to properly respond to event packaging and labelling specifications.

**One piece of advice I'd have is to plan early, and get a really clear remit from the event organisers in terms of their objectives and requirements for each waste stream. That way you can work together to meet requirements.**

Helen McFarlane, Environmental Consultant, McDonald's

#### 4. How recycling messaging added value to the business

McDonald's Games-time recycling messaging related to ensuring compliance with LOCOG's statutory requirements. A significant amount of effort and investment was put into achieving certification of packaging products to ensure they complied with the waste streams stipulated, as well as designing the corresponding packaging and bin labels themselves.

However, McDonald's chose not to promote these efforts or the recycling theme as part of CSR or promotions. This decision was influenced by the lack of ability to implement recycling across the business in the immediate future. The concern is that a higher profile for recycling messages would have led to misleading consumer expectations.

Any major changes to either procurement or waste systems at McDonald's restaurants would need to be agreed by their European headquarters. The European-wide Waste and Packaging Strategy to 2016 does not currently reflect the lessons from the Games.

Variations in waste policy and recyclate processing across Europe complicates the ability to adopt Games-time practices as they may not be suitable for some countries. Packaging is already recycled in some places as per statutory requirements (for example Austria). A UK-only initiative is thought to impact on the economies of scale currently achieved by purchasing packaging at a European level<sup>7</sup>. However, this may be counter balanced by a decrease in disposal costs where valuable recyclates can be recovered, or the additional value potential from closed-loop recycling back into new packaging.

In terms of benefits to the brand, McDonald's anecdotal feedback does indicate that consumers perceive recycling as positive, and discussions are expected to take place at McDonald's European headquarters to investigate this in the longer term.

#### 5. McDonald's recommendations for improving recycling

McDonald's would welcome a standardised national recycling system:

**What was used on the Park worked really well. If local authorities and government could adopt that process nationally, it would help massively in terms of how we talk to our customers. In Scotland, we're starting a trial to separate food waste, and if we could just have that orange compostable logo on the bin and everyone recognised that as compostable waste, that would be fantastic.**

Helen McFarlane, Environment Consultant, McDonald's

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<sup>7</sup> McDonald's have 1200 restaurants in the UK compared to 7500 across Europe.

## 6. Conclusions

McDonald's made significant investment and effort in partnering with LOCOG to meet the required packaging and waste requirements, including investment in packaging materials that would only be used during the Games. This was noted by LOCOG in working with them, and played its part in aiming to achieve 70% reuse, recycling and composting.

In terms of recycling messaging, it is difficult to draw conclusions as waste was hand-sorted after it had been segregated by consumers and kitchen staff, and no surveys were carried out to gauge messaging effectiveness.

The recycling theme was limited in time and space to Games-time on-Park restaurants only. Messaging was not integrated across different communications channels such as the environment leaflets and TV campaigns - which made no reference to Games recycling activities.

Based on anecdotal evidence, McDonald's believe packaging and bin icons worked well although they could have been more prominent. The bespoke packaging diagrams worked well though some may have found these confusing. The risk of contradictory symbols should be noted when balancing long-term wider consumer behaviour waste campaigns with event-specific recycling messaging.

With regards to staff, picking the best staff from existing operations and training them in recycling objectives meant they were enthusiastic and confident channels for the recycling message. However, future event caterers would need to ensure they allocate enough staff to engage consumers, even if the outlets are busier than expected.

McDonald's approach to recycling shifts responsibility for segregating waste onto waste partners rather than relying on consumer and staff behaviour. Whilst this may have delivered assured outcomes, however possible disadvantages are lower quality recycle, lack of behaviour change influence and additional operational costs.

As well as supporting an event specific waste system, future event sponsors and caterers could consider the potential business benefits from using their brand identity to devise motivational recycling marketing, ideally making links between the event's recycling regime, and improvements in their on-going business activity.

By doing so, the potential benefits are:

- generating brand association with positive behaviours that reinforce or are consistent with national campaigns and recycling behaviours at home;
- reducing the costs for intermediate sorting by increasing customer and staff led segregation;
- capitalising on event-time packaging developments to reduce disposal costs across the business more widely; and
- contributing to improving consumers recycling behaviour and brand association beyond the event itself.

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