SWANA Excellence Award Nomination - Marketing

“Be A Hero - Fight Garbage” Campaign

County of Simcoe
Environmental Services Department
April 3, 2009
Executive Summary

The County of Simcoe is proud of the overwhelming success of the new Curbside Organics Collection Program launched in September 2008. Residents across the region have embraced our waste diversion initiatives including organics collection, expanded blue box program and one bag garbage limit. Our unique marketing campaign “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” has increased awareness and created excitement for waste diversion in our community and enforced the belief that waste management is a responsibility for every individual. All residents were encouraged to participate and to make a difference for the greater good of Simcoe County. The resulting success has put Simcoe County at the forefront in Ontario, as one of only a few municipalities to meet the provincial 60 per cent waste diversion goal. This achievement was possible through the leadership and forward thinking of Simcoe County Council. The County continues to build on the success by engaging youth and by encouraging residents to surpass their neighbours’ participation rates. It is that competitive edge that allows Simcoe County to raise the bar for waste diversion in Ontario.
1) Statement of Intent:

The County of Simcoe is applying for the SWANA Marketing Excellence Award in order to showcase the triumph of our marketing campaign which was developed to sell the new curbside waste diversion program. The new program was anchored by an organics (kitchen waste) collection, and supplemented by expanded blue box materials and a reduction to one bag per week garbage limit. The requirement for an effective marketing program was identified early in the planning process in order to maximize public awareness and participation in the new waste diversion programs. Some of the unique and exciting aspects of this marketing campaign are briefly identified below:

The slogan “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” promoted personal responsibility for waste generation while recognizing that diverting waste requires extra work and that active participants should be acknowledged as heroes.

In keeping with the “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” theme a superhero, Diversion Man, was created as part of the marketing campaign in order to engage children. We believe strongly that appealing to our youth is vital to the success of the program as they are able to encourage their families to participate.

The County of Simcoe’s marketing and advertising campaign included:
- A media launch
- Calendars
- Posters
- Stickers
- Newsletters
- Messaging on collection bins
- Diversion Man mascot
- A sorting guide
- Billboard advertising
- Collection Vehicle Signage
- Website
- T-shirts and golf shirts
- Hats
- Colouring and activity books
- Temporary tattoos

The marketing strategy was and continues to be extremely successful. During the first month of the program implementation the waste diversion rate increased from 32% to 51%. And after 5 months of the program the waste diversion rate remains above 52%. These waste diversion rates demonstrate that the marketing campaign was successful; residents of the County of Simcoe embrace the program and have become the programs heroes.
2) Research/Planning:

Describe the need for this program/project: what were the facts and perceptions regarding the problem or situation? Include a synopsis of research data/methods

Need for the Program:

The County of Simcoe, located in Central Ontario, is responsible for solid waste management for 120,000 households. Like many other Ontario municipalities the County is experiencing a shortage of landfill disposal capacity. The County is pursuing increased waste diversion in order to extend its limited disposal capacity available. In order to achieve this, a new curbside waste diversion program including organics (kitchen waste) collection, expanded blue box materials and a reduction to one bag per week garbage limit was approved for implementation.

The facts and perceptions regarding the situation were:

- Approved disposal capacity remaining at the beginning of 2008 was limited to only 8 years.
- It was anticipated that increased waste diversion would extend the lifespan of existing landfills.
- The perception that waste management is a government responsibility rather than an individual responsibility.
- Strong local opposition to creation of new disposal capacity would provide the political and public support necessary to implement a new waste diversion program.
- An extensive and effective marketing campaign needed to be implemented to ensure that residents would take personal responsibility for waste management and to sell the new waste diversion program.
- An extensive and effective promotion and education program needed to be implemented to further cultivate the public awareness generated by the marketing campaign and serve to inform residents of the specifics of the new curbside waste diversion program.

The marketing campaign’s goal therefore is to support the new curbside waste diversion program by effectively selling it to the public to maximize awareness and participation.

Research Data/Methods:

- A pilot project was undertaken in 4,000 households to determine potential program results and barriers to success. Figure 1 illustrates that the pilot project diversion rate was 57% compared with the County average diversion rate 32%. Throughout the pilot program research data was gathered through:
  - tonnage and participation analysis
  - waste audits
  - surveys
  - focus groups
This research data was used to assess what was successful in the pilot program vs. what could be improved upon in a full County program implementation. This process greatly assisted in the identification of some specific areas that the marketing campaign should be targeted at and supported the chosen methods of implementation.

- A review of neighbouring municipalities marketing and advertising campaigns was conducted. We wanted to understand what these other campaigns utilized in terms of slogans and mascots, promotional literature and materials, methods of delivery of materials and media outlets employed, etc. As well as other items that were considered relative to their success. An informal survey was created and sent to program managers. This allowed us to determine what portions of their campaigns they felt were effective and which they felt were not and why.

- A review of the strategies utilized in the now ubiquitous blue box program was conducted to determine why it is so successful. The strategy of engaging children to foster participation in the blue box program has been integral to the program’s success. In addition, “ownership” of waste and the “keeping up with the Joneses” approach in single family units has proven vital to program success compared to problems experienced in multi-family units.

- The County secured the services of a marketing and communications company to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the various aspects of the marketing campaign as it was being developed and to ensure that the overall direction of the campaign was appealing and would address the goals of the program.

- The County’s own Communications department was utilized to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the various aspects of the marketing campaign as it was being developed and to ensure that the overall direction of the campaign was appealing and would succeed in meeting or exceeding its goals.

- Various informal focus groups were utilized to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the various aspects of the marketing campaign, to ensure that the overall direction of the campaign was appealing and would address the goals of the program.
Describe examples of materials that were previously being used prior to implementing this program/project.

Prior to the implementation of this project the following marketing and advertising materials were utilized to promote the County of Simcoe’s existing curbside collection and waste diversion programs:

- Annually a curbside collection calendar was developed and distributed as the main vehicle to educate residents regarding waste management collection, disposal services and special events. There was no marketing strategy employed and no real consistency between this medium and others used.
- The County’s website included information to educate residents regarding waste management collection, disposal services and special events. There was no marketing strategy employed and no real consistency between this medium and others used.
- Newspaper advertisements were utilized to promote changes to collection schedules due to holidays and special collection events but no other program promotion was done and no other advertising mediums were used regularly.

Describe the target audience(s) and how this program/project is appropriate for the audience(s).

Describe the target audience(s):

Through the research and planning phase of this project it was identified that the target audience for this marketing campaign is local single family residents. This includes not just adult homeowners but children as well as it was recognized that children play a significant role in influencing adult behaviour with respect to environmental initiatives. Engaging children through the marketing campaign would therefore foster participation in the new curbside waste diversion program.

How is this program/project appropriate for the audience?

The specific aspects of the marketing campaign and their influence on the target audience are described below:

- “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” is the campaign slogan which embodies the concept that waste management is an individual responsibility for which we all need to do our part in order to make a difference. The slogan is visually appealing to the target audiences, providing an iconic reference to the new curbside waste diversion program. A variation on the slogan theme “I’m A Hero” was also used so that residents participating in the program could make a statement that they are doing...
their part to divert waste and to foster the “keeping up with the Joneses” social marketing strategy.

- With the recent success of many Hollywood movies such as Spider Man, Batman and Ironman, the use of a hero as part of a marketing strategy is timely. The County of Simcoe’s “Be a Hero – Fight Garbage” marketing campaign capitalized on this trend with the development of a Superhero Diversion Man to inspire the fight against garbage. This led to the creation of the overall campaign look which mimics a comic book in order to engage youth. The look of the campaign is extremely exciting and serves to interest the all target audiences in normally mundane chore of managing waste.

Describe the goals of the program/project (goals should be specific, realistic and measurable) and the strategies/tasks planned to meet the goals

The marketing campaign’s goal:

To effectively support the new curbside waste diversion program by selling it to the public to maximize awareness and participation.

The strategies/tasks planned to meet the goals included:

- To effectively target residents identified through the planning phase.
- To utilize the same principles that makes the blue box program so successful.
- To develop a slogan which encapsulates the ultimate goal of the new curbside waste diversion program which is to maximize waste diversion and extend disposal capacities.
- To develop recognizable iconic references to the new curbside waste diversion program.
- To change the perception from landfills being a problem to garbage being a problem.
Describe any anticipated obstacles and the opportunities for meeting the goals

Anticipated obstacles:

- The large geographical area and diffuse population settlement in our service area
- The lack of comprehensive media outlets
- Language and comprehension barriers
- Variations of programs in bordering communities

Opportunities for meeting the goals:

Overcoming the obstacles and effectively getting our messaging out was achieved by utilizing a number of strategies including:

- A large media event was held which featured a dramatic unveiling of the campaign slogan and superhero “Diversion Man”. It was attended by all local print, radio and television outlets, gaining extensive positive media coverage which covered the entire the municipality and continued for a significant period of time. Please see supplemental information for examples of newspaper articles.

- As there is a lack of a single large media outlet, marketing was undertaken using a variety of delivery methods to ensure that the target audiences were reached. This included home delivery of a complete education kit, bulk mail of a series of newsletters, bulk and direct mail of a calendar, a series of staged newspaper advertisements in several newspapers to ensure coverage, radio advertisements, various media interviews, billboard advertising, and the strategic placement of posters to ensure that the entire community was blanketed with the messaging. In order to further support the program across the community a variety of promotional items were developed such as t-shirts, reusable grocery bags, and temporary tattoos which served as walking billboards for our message.

- The campaign slogan “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” and the superhero “Diversion Man” were utilized as iconic symbols to create awareness of the new curbside waste diversion program at a glance regardless of language and comprehension levels. Further use of the comic book look of the campaign lent itself to the extensive use of individual colours and graphics to reduce language and comprehension barriers.

- An extensive promotion and education program was initiated to address specific aspects of the new curbside waste diversion program including variations to programs in bordering communities. The promotion and education campaign extensively utilized the iconic marketing slogan and superhero character in order to assist in differentiating between programs.
3) Implementation/Execution

Describe how the program/project was implemented using a timeframe of events that lists each activity/task.

The new curbside waste diversion program was launched in September 2008, therefore planning and implementation of the marketing campaign began approximately a year in advance. The timeframe of events is provided below:
Discuss the budget for the program/project (including any funding leverage). If any of the items exceeded the budget, explain why?

The budget for the marketing campaign was approximately 1 million dollars. As all items in the marketing campaign were covered by the budget it was not necessary to leverage funding. As the marketing campaign resources were sufficient, no items exceeded the budget. The campaign budget included the following components:

**Marketing and Communications Consultant** – The County solicited the services of a marketing specialist to aid in the development of the marketing strategy.

**Media Event** – A media event was held in order to kick off the marketing campaign. In order to ensure a professional event the budget for this event was generous, a staging company provided all of the necessary accoutrements and local personalities acted as masters of ceremony, a media challenge and many displays ensured excellent media coverage of the event.

**Calendar** – A enhanced curbside collection calendar was created to promote the new program and educate the public on how to participate. Its distribution was timed to coincide with the roll-out of the new curbside collection program. The budget for the calendar included the design, printing and distribution components.

**Curbside Green Bins and Kitchen Containers** – Although these items were budgeted as a capital expense, the costs to emboss the “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” on the container lids and “I’m A Hero” which was hot stamped onto the curbside collection bin were considered to be part of the marketing and promotion of the program. These costs were therefore included in the marketing campaign budget.

**Education Kit** - Information and marketing pieces were included as an education kit inside the green bin and delivered to all residents. These kits included: a re-useable cloth grocery bag, fridge magnets outlining what was acceptable in the new program, a sorting guide and samples of certified compostable bags, which featured the campaign messaging.

**Advertisement** – An extensive advertising campaign was utilized which included newsletters, newspapers, radio, collection vehicle signs and billboard advertisement. This portion of the budget also included all production and printing costs.

**Mascot Costume** – A costume was included in the budget and included development of the original concept sourcing and supplier.

**Giveaways** – Various promotional giveaways were developed to aid in the campaign and production costs. The County supplied giveaways including, t-shirts, golf-shirts, hats with logos, re-useable grocery cloth bags, colouring and activity books and tattoos. The budget for these items included the design and the printing.
Describe any partnerships or collaborations with other organizations

In order to successfully launch the “Be A Hero - Fight Garbage” campaign, County staff worked with the following organizations:

- Benjamin Communications, a marketing and communications company which collaborated in the development of the marketing campaign by providing feedback on the effectiveness of the various aspects of the project as it was being developed to ensure that the overall direction of the campaign was appealing and would address the program goals. They further collaborated on the project by developing the necessary graphics and sourcing many of the individual marketing pieces utilized throughout the campaign.

- Norseman Plastics, the supplier of the curbside organics bin collaborated in the project by implementing two unique features. The lid of the curbside container was embossed with the campaign slogan and program information. Also the placement of a hot stamped slogan variation “I’m A Hero” on the traffic side of the container rather than the front was unique.

- Busch Systems, supplier of the kitchen green bin, worked in partnership with the County to emboss the lid of their container with the campaign slogan. This was a first for their manufacturing process and was extremely successful.

- Vision Quest Environmental Strategies facilitated the inclusion of certified compostable bags in the education kit to promote the organics portion of the new curbside waste diversion program.

- Bag-to-Earth, Clorox, and Ralston each provided over 120,000 free sample compostable bags to promote the organics portion of the new curbside waste diversion program. These suppliers also included the campaign messaging on the materials.

- The Simcoe County District School Board played an integral role by partnering with the County of Simcoe in a pilot program at local schools for the new curbside waste diversion program and by collaborating on presentation of key program messaging to youth.

- Local Ratepayer Associations partnered with the County during the program launch by participating in media launch and promotion and education campaign
Discuss how well the elements described in the planning phase were accomplished

Following are the elements described in the planning phase and a description of how they were accomplished:

- Effectively target residents identified through the planning phase

  This was accomplished by providing a unique and dynamic marketing campaign which was delivered using specific mediums to ensure that the target audiences were reached. The various marketing pieces were either home delivered, provided in schools, through bulk and addressed mail, via newspaper, radio and television ads, and on billboards in order to maximize their effectiveness.

- To utilize the same principles which made the blue box program so successful

  As children are so effectively able to influence the adults in their lives with respect to environmental initiatives, this element was accomplished by specifically targeting the marketing campaign to appeal to youth. Another principle which was successfully employed for the blue box program was the “keeping up with the Joneses” strategy. The County’s marketing project emphasized this with the strategic placement of a variation of the campaign slogan “I’m A Hero” on the side of the curbside green bin. This messaging makes a statement that by participating in the program residents are doing their part to fight garbage, thus spurring neighbourhood competitiveness.

- To develop a slogan which encapsulates the ultimate goal of the new curbside waste diversion program which is to maximize waste diversion and extend disposal capacities.

  The slogan “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” was created to sell the concept to the target audience that waste management is an individual responsibility for which we all need to do our part in order to make a difference. The message and the visual image of the slogan evoke a response with the fist coming out of a garbage bag symbolically emphasizing our goal of maximizing waste diversion. The use of the colour green links to the green bin program generally and the green in the ripped plastic of the garbage bag illustrates need for getting the divertible “green” waste out of the garbage. The slogan successfully encapsulates the goal of the new curbside waste diversion program.

- Develop recognizable iconic references to the new curbside waste diversion program.
The slogan “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” itself is visually appealing to the target audiences and provides an iconic reference to the new curbside waste diversion program. The slogan lent itself to the development of the programs own superhero “Diversion Man” which became a recognizable iconic reference and was utilized extensively to engage the target audience.

- To change the perception from landfills being a problem to garbage being a problem.

The reference to fighting garbage within the “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” slogan reinforces the notion that garbage is the problem not the disposal that results from the creation of garbage.

Creativity: describe how your program/project is unique or an improvement over a similar project/program

- “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” is an edgy campaign slogan and unique in that it evokes a response and inspires individuals to do their part and take responsibility for their own waste. The font and layout of the slogan are graphically appealing and the use of the colour green in the slogan ties it to the organics (green bin) program. The County of Simcoe’s slogan is very different than those utilized by other municipalities for similar projects which used slogans such as “Going Green”, “Mission Green”, “Greening Vaughan” as well as corporate messaging such as “the Greener Good”, etc. It was felt that the “green” messaging was being overused and lacked the connection to the ultimate goals of the project.

- The superhero “Diversion Man” is also unique as many similar programs utilize very juvenile cartoon collection bins as mascots. Still other programs utilize small animals in their campaigns in order to tie in a nature theme to their projects but there is generally no identifiable connection between the graphic and the campaign. “Diversion Man” ties into the “Be A Hero – Fight Garbage” slogan as he is a superhero. His costume is green and he has the same graphic utilized in the slogan, a garbage bag with a fist coming through it, on his chest; all of which connect the character with the slogan and the program.

- The comic book appearance of the products used to market the program was extremely unique for this type of program. We are not aware of any similar programs that have utilized this campaign format. The comic book theme is extremely colourful and eye catching with many graphic punches used to
highlight important information. It is appealing to all, but particularly to children. The iconic nature allows recognition of the program and the graphics used in the marketing materials is visual based to overcome language and comprehension barriers for the target audience. Other similar programs have utilized very juvenile cartoon collection bins in their waste management campaigns or images of nature which do not tie directly to their program.
4) Results/Evaluation:

Describe how the target audience(s) participated in, or reacted to, the program/project.

The target audiences participated in the campaign throughout the process. During the planning phase both the adult and youth target audiences were solicited for feedback on various slogan concepts, design options, etc. Their perceptions, reactions and comments were considered in the creation of the finished slogan, superhero and the comic book theme utilized in marketing and promotional pieces. The feedback received on the final pieces was extremely positive. Many local residents took the time to contact the County with unsolicited feedback and compliments such as:

“I want to congratulate you on your new program. I received the bins and the set-up package on Tuesday. I went through the whole package and found it to be extremely informative and organized. I have completed all of the preliminary set-up and am looking forward to September to start the program. Congratulations on the program and the package that you sent to everyone. It will be making the transition easy for everyone. Particular congratulations to those responsible for the material to help everyone get started, without these resources I believe many would have found it difficult to get into the program.”

“I would like to express my appreciation of your Green Bin Program. This initiative was very well planned. We had plenty of notice and explanation, with information sheets made available to us showing what goes where. The kits were distributed with nicely designed small and large green bins and samples of the biodegradable bags we can use. I do hope you are experiencing willing compliance and reduced landfill material from all areas of Simcoe County.”

Many residents called in and provided anecdotes which demonstrate the effectiveness of the marketing project such as: very young children becoming excited at the delivery of the green bins and education kits saying things like “the superhero was here” and going through the education kit as if Diversion Man were Santa Claus that had delivered presents. There were numerous reports of green bins and education kits being stolen from streets from enthusiastic residents at the beginning of the distribution process, indicating the excitement level and determination to participate in the program.

The campaign surrounding the program was strategically launched to coincide with the distribution of materials used in the new collection program. It was expected that local residents would become enthusiastic about the program and anticipate receipt of their green bins and education kits. This enthusiasm proved to be the case as Customer Service contacts increased by 246% over the same period the previous year as a result of the marketing campaign. Through this, only three complaints were lodged with respect to the marketing campaign, this represents only 0.0009% of the service population.

The target audience reaction to the campaign was positive as demonstrated through recent participation studies and tonnage data. Studies indicate that 65% of County residents are actively participating in the new organics (green bin) program and that 90%
of County residents are meeting the new one bag garbage limit. The average County resident is disposing of 33.9% less garbage and has increased their curbside waste diversion to 54% from 32% over the same period the previous year. Further details on this are provided in the following section.

**Demonstrate how success was measured. Relate back to the goals stated in the research/planning section**

**The marketing campaign’s goal:**

To effectively support the new curbside waste diversion program by selling it to the public to maximize awareness and participation.

To judge the impact of the marketing program we investigated the response in the pilot project area which consisted of 4,000 households (approx. 3% of the County’s total units). In the pilot project area the curbside waste diversion program was in place for a number of years in advance of the full County program. Results in the pilot area showed a 20% increase in the tonnage of organics collected and a 9% decrease in garbage over the same period the previous year. The only difference was the marketing campaign. This result proves the success of the marketing strategy in selling the public to maximize program awareness and participation.

The success of the marketing project can also be measured by comparing program participation results with those of a bordering community. This community provided statistics for their similar curbside waste diversion program. Their results indicate an organics participation rate of just 24% in contrast to the County of Simcoe’s participation rate of 65%.
The success of the marketing program can further be demonstrated using the goals identified in the planning process and measured by performing a comparison of waste generation and diversion pre and post program implementation:

- Increase waste diversion – Waste diversion data for the first five months of the new curbside collection program, October 2008 to February 2009, was compared over the same period the previous year in order to measure the success of the program in meeting this goal. The data illustrated below indicates that the average County household has increased their curbside waste diversion by 22.4% over the same period the previous year. Overall, waste diversion increased to 54% at curbside over the first five months of the program, up from 32% over the same period the previous year. Divertible material tonnages received to date have exceeded our projections, further illustrating the success of the marketing campaign in selling the program to residents.

- Extend the County’s existing disposal capacity - Garbage collection data for the first five months of the new curbside collection program, October 2008 to February 2009, was compared over the same period the previous year in order to measure the success of the program in meeting this goal. The data indicates that the average County household has decreased their curbside garbage requiring disposal by 33.9% over the same period the previous year. Participation studies indicate 90% of County residents are meeting the new one bag garbage limit weekly further illustrating the success of the marketing campaign in selling the program to residents. This reduction in garbage requiring disposal is expected to extend the lifespan of the County’s existing waste disposal facilities by a similar 33%.
Discuss how the program/project can be improved

Although the marketing campaign to drive the County’s new curbside collection program has been extremely successful and has achieved all of its goals, internally the project could have been improved by beginning the process earlier. Development of the slogan and design as well as obtaining feedback on the original concepts took considerably more time than was projected.

Is the project/program replicable in other communities for similar target audience(s)?

This project is easily duplicated in other communities that have similar target audiences. Challenges were found because Simcoe County is located in a predominantly rural setting and due to a lack of comprehensive media outlets and the variations between programs in neighbouring communities. The County of Simcoe accomplished its goals of high participation and diversion rates by creating a unique marketing campaign with an effective slogan and by targeting the appropriate audiences. A variety of mediums were utilized to blanket the community with the messaging including, a large media launch, newspaper advertisements, paid radio advertising and PSA’s, television coverage, billboard advertising, bulk and direct mail and home delivery of information with green bin distribution.