TITLE: 2017 Excellence Award Entry

CATEGORY: Awareness Campaign

ORGANIZATION: City of North Port Solid Waste Division

ENTRY TITLE: North Port’s Creative Awareness Campaigns

JURISDICTION: North Port, Florida

POPULATION: 60,380

BUDGET: $65,000 (Includes staff, printing, materials)

COST PER HOUSEHOLD: $2.28

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The City of North Port’s Solid Waste Division has a nationally recognized and award winning outreach strategy. Since 2015, North Port has used innovative communication strategies on social media, video and direct mailings to raise awareness in the community.

We are applying for the Awareness Campaign Excellence Award to highlight the success our weekly outreach campaigns have experienced over the last two years. North Port Solid Waste has seen growth in social media engagement and an increased amount of support from our residents. While most organizations have a “press release” and “playing defense” mentality – North Port stays on the offense, using outreach strategies to connect with residents. Whether it’s our viral videos that reach millions of people or our weekly social media posts, awareness is part of who we are.

Our campaigns focus on educating residents about recycling and our overall Solid Waste program.
Why raise awareness?

The City of North Port Solid Waste Division has been creating weekly awareness campaigns since May of 2015. However, in 2017 we implemented a brand-new, City-wide recycling program! This new program meant a change in the dual-stream recycling service for over 28,000 homes. Prior to the new program, recycling was collected manually with old blue bins. Our New Recycling Program is automated and provides two recycling totes with wheels, one for paper products and one for commingled glass, plastic, and cans.

Collection between the two totes rotates each week. One week we’ll collect material from the tote with a blue lid (commingle), the next week we’ll collect material from the tote with the tan lid (paper). The goal of the new recycling program is to increase recycling rates, driver safety and efficiency.

Due to the new program, North Port was faced with a unique challenge/opportunity to raise awareness on the new program and educate residents about the changes.
What resources do we use?

Prior to social media, the Solid Waste Division relied heavily on direct mailers, press releases and website postings. However, on May 8, 2015, that all changed. That is the day the City of North Port launched their social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Statista.com estimates 81% of people in the United States use some kind of social networking account. **To raise awareness effectively, we must tell our story in the places people are spending their time.** Currently, people all over the country are spending massive amounts of time on social media.

Our Solid Waste Division does not have its own Facebook page. This is an intentional part of the awareness strategy. We realize the City of North Port’s main page reaches a larger audience than a specific Solid Waste page would. Our strategy is to use the City’s main account with the largest platform to spread awareness.

Social media is just one new piece of the puzzle. Our awareness strategy includes digital marketing, direct marketing and public events.
Our plan heading into the 2016/2017 fiscal year was to educate our three target audiences (digital audience, traditional audience and public audience) about the new recycling program, along with raise awareness of the services provided by our Solid Waste Division. Each campaign goal and objective was SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timebound).
Digital Audience – Planning & Goal Setting

The digital audience includes residents who regularly read news stories on our website or follow one of the City’s social media accounts. Our SMART Goals for the 2016/2017 fiscal year included:

Goal #1: Increase the City’s Facebook following to 9,500 fans.

- On October 1, 2016, the City of North Port had 7,899 Facebook fans.
- From our experience with Solid Waste’s 2015’s viral lip sync video, we knew a new video was capable of increasing the City’s Facebook fan total quickly.

Goal #2: Post weekly on social media, reach over 3,000 people and increase engagement on all social media posts.

- Solid Waste leadership and our Customer Service Coordinator held each other accountable to come up with creative, weekly social media posts for the Division.
- Facebook’s insights feature makes it easy for organizations like local governments to measure results.
Goal #3: Create a lip-sync video to thank our residents that receives over 100,000 views.

- Why a lip sync video? It humanizes our Division and shows resident’s our employees are normal people, who love their job.
- Our first lip sync video in 2015 went viral and received over 400,000 views.
- The 2015 viral video was created for the Christmas holiday. Our strategy in 2016 was to create a video for Thanksgiving.

Traditional Audience – Planning & Goal Setting

Our traditional audience must be reached through direct marketing since they are not online. Direct marketing includes mailers, flyers, etc. Our SMART Goals for the 2016/2017 fiscal year included:

Goal #1: Create a new Solid Waste Guide and deliver it to every home in the City.

- Solid Waste Guides are a great resource for North Port residents, providing details on how our service works. The new recycling program is significantly different than the old manual program, the Solid Waste Guides needed updated.
- Our budget for printing costs was $11,000.

Goal #2: Draft a letter with instructions on the new recycling program.

- Our Solid Waste Guides provide a general scope for the service we provide. However, there are specific details for the new recycling program that were unable to be included (Ex: which side of the street to place the new totes, what to do with the old containers). Therefore, a letter was drafted to be proactive and address these questions up front.
Public Audience – Planning & Goal Setting

Our public audience includes residents we meet at public events like our annual Public Works Road-E-O, Newcomer Day and visits to local schools. Our SMART Goals for the 2016/2017 fiscal year included:

Goal #1: Hold a Public Works Road-E-O that attracts over 1,300 attendees.

- The Public Works Road-E-O is a fun, “festival-like” event for the entire family. There’s music, food vendors, children’s activities and much more. The highlight of the day is the “Road-E-O in which Solid Waste and Operations’ heavy equipment drivers showcase their skills in a challenging obstacle course competition. It’s a great way to reach out to the community about recycling!

- Our budget for online advertising was $450.

Goal #2: Attend more than 10 public events.

- One of the most effective ways to educate residents about recycling is one-on-one interaction. Each year, we make it a priority to visit local schools, community organization and public events.
Digital Audience - Implementation

Goal #1: Increase the City’s Facebook following to 9,500 fans.

The biggest obstacle when implementing any digital marketing campaign is “noise”. There are an incredible number of websites, social media posts and videos.

There’s only one way to break through the “noise” – create incredible content that people are truly interested in. Governmental jargon that is uninteresting, will be ignored.

Goal #2: Post weekly on social media, reach over 3,000 people and increase engagement on all social media posts.

Driving awareness to Solid Waste is only part of our job. Our most important task in the Solid Waste Division is providing a great service for our residents! It can be difficult to create social media content each week, along with all of our customer service duties.

Using the City of North Port’s main Facebook page to post about Solid Waste provides us with a larger platform. However, we are not the only Division that posts on the page. Facebook’s newsfeed algorithm (which determines the posts users see) takes into account all of the posts on our page. This means a post about a different division, that doesn’t perform well, can negatively affect our next post about Solid Waste.

Goal #3: Create a lip-sync video to thank our residents that receives over 100,000 views.

There’s no better way to say “thank you” to our residents for their support, than with a new lip sync video for Thanksgiving. However, due to the incredible success of our first viral video, many residents ask when our next video is coming out. As everyone knows, it’s very difficult to match the popularity of the “original hit” with a sequel.
Traditional Audience - Implementation

Goal #1: Create a new Solid Waste Guide and deliver it to every home in the City.

The biggest challenge with delivering new Solid Waste Guides to every home is postage costs. Our budget for printing was $11,000. The cost of mailing a guide to each home in North Port would be too expensive.

Our solution was to include them in the delivery of the new recycling totes. We had community volunteers from the North Port Police Department come to help us trifold over 28,000 Solid Waste Guides. Once they were folded and placed in small bags, delivery crews tied each bag to the handle of the new totes.

Goal #2: Draft a letter with instructions on the new recycling program.

The City of North Port has one side of the street garbage collection in many neighborhoods. This became an obstacle when planning for the new recycling program. For efficiency and safety reasons, many residents would need to set their recycling totes on the opposite side of the street as their garbage.

It was challenging to describe the new collection process in a simple way everyone would understand. Once finished, these letters were included in the bag with the Solid Waste Guides.
Your NEW Recycling Program is here!

The City of North Port is excited to announce the launch of the new recycling program in your neighborhood! The new program is more convenient, makes recycling easier and is much safer for our hardworking drivers. We’ve received a lot of positive feedback so far!

Your current 18-gallon bins are being replaced with two 32, 65 or 95-gallon recycling totes. Collection between the two totes will rotate each week. One week we’ll pick up the tote with a tan lid (paper materials), the next week we will pick up the tote with a blue lid (commingled materials). A 2017 collection calendar is located under the tan lid. Garbage collection will stay the same and continue to be collected every week.

**What should I do with my old recycling bins after I receive the new recycling totes?**

You have three options:
1. You can keep them for personal use.
2. If you do NOT want the old recycling bins, please place them at the curb. Solid Waste will collect and recycle them.
3. Drop them off at Public Works (1100 N. Chamberlain Blvd) and we will recycle them.

**Which side of the street should I place my new recycling totes for collection?**

- If garbage is collected on your side of the street, you will place recycling on the other side.
- If garbage is collected on the opposite side, recycling will stay on your side.
- If garbage is collected on both sides of the street, then you will keep recycling on your side.

If you have any other questions, please call Customer Service at 941-240-8050.

-Your Solid Waste Division
Public Audience - Implementation

Goal #1: Hold a Public Works Road-E-O that attracts over 1,300 attendees.

Our goal of 1,300 attendees was achievable, but not easy. In 2016, approximately 900 people attended the Road-E-O. It was a bold goal of a 44% increase, but we had an idea!

We launched the North Port Solid Waste Experience! Residents and children were able to get inside and see what it’s like to operate the arm of a garbage/recycling truck. To promote the “attraction”, we used $50 in Facebook ads to boost the post to all our page’s fans.

Goal #2: Attend more than 10 public events.

The biggest obstacle with public events is time. If not made a priority, community events can easily be forgotten. Thankfully, our Solid Waste Division has many volunteers in the Division who are willing to attend these functions (many times on their own free time) – to educate the community. We also have a Customer Service Coordinator who can schedule these events for Solid Waste.
Digital Audience - Results

Goal #1: Increase the City’s Facebook following to 9,500 fans.

When we started the campaign, we had 7,899 fans. As of May 12, 2017, the City of North Port has 9,970 Facebook fans. That’s a 26% increase in approximately 8 months!

We learned that creative and valuable content is the most effective way to attract new people to social media campaigns. By the end of this fiscal year, we’ll likely have over 10,000 fans!
Goal #2: Post weekly on social media, reach over 3,000 people and increase engagement on all social media posts.

The reaction we received from our digital audience was very positive. The great thing about raising awareness online is that we could answer a lot of questions about the new recycling program.

As you can see from the screenshots, we achieved our goal of reaching over 3,000 on almost all our weekly posts. Thanks to our staff and Microsoft Outlook reminders – we held ourselves accountable and posted weekly updates about our Solid Waste Division. Many of these posts were used to promote the new recycling program.

Goal #3: Create a lip-sync video to thank our residents that receives over 100,000 views.

This year’s holiday lip-sync video was another huge success! Although, we didn’t top last year’s viewer count, we still received over 125,000 views between our Facebook page and news outlets that shared it. This has become a staple of our Solid Waste Division and will be annual “thank you” to our residents for their support.

Every community event where Solid Waste goes to present and answer questions, residents ask when the next video is coming out!

Watch the “Thanksgiving Medley”: youtube.com/watch?v=Mm08dI7Edys
Traditional Audience - Results

Goals #1 & 2: Create a new Solid Waste Guide and deliver it to every home in the City. Also draft a letter with instructions on the new recycling program.

The delivery of the new Solid Waste Guides and recycling instructions letter went smoothly! Our budget was $11,000 and we were able to print the guides for $2,013. The only obstacle we faced is that many residents did not read them thoroughly and called with questions.

Public Audience - Results

Goal #1: Hold a Public Works Road-E-O that attracts over 1,300 attendees.

Our 2017 Public Works Road-E-O was a HUGE success! In 2016, approximately 900 people attended the community event. This year, over 2,000 people came!

This is the type of event that other municipalities can easily implement in their community. We only spent approximately $450 to promote the event on Facebook and that funding came from our event sponsors! The “Solid Waste Experience” was the most popular exhibit and had people waiting in line throughout the event (up to 45 minutes long). We’re going to add a 3rd truck to the “experience” for next year.

Goal #2: Attend more than 10 public events.

As of May 15, 2017, Solid Waste has attended 13 public events and reached over 5,000 people. We’ve visited 2 local schools, 4 community organizations and 7 community events. This awareness strategy can be replicated in other municipalities. When we connect with residents outside of our normal day-to-day service, it humanizes our brand.
What did we learn?

Our Solid Waste Division learned several lessons throughout these campaigns. We learned digital marketing is more cost effective, especially compared to the printing costs of traditional brochures. Although our overall marketing cost was very low at $2.28 per household, the majority came from our Customer Service Coordinator’s salary. If we did not include salaries in our budget, the cost per household would only be $0.53 cents!

We learned video is currently the most effective way to raise awareness. Whether it was our new recycling program or the “Solid Waste Experience”, we reached the most residents and received the most social media engagement on video campaigns.

Most people see government as boring and out of touch. That’s why we intentionally create awareness campaigns that are unique and entertaining. Creative campaigns humanize our brand and show residents we’re hard working individuals serving the community.

Can these campaigns be replicated?

Absolutely! Since the budget of these campaigns was minimal, municipalities of any size can implement many of our awareness strategies. Social media is free! An expensive, large production crew is not necessary. Our first viral video was filmed on an iPhone!

Our school presentations don’t require any special materials – just a positive attitude that’s ready to educate and have fun with the students. The new Solid Waste Guides were designed in-house and printed at a very affordable rate. We were almost $9,000 under our budget!

In conclusion, we know these awareness campaigns do require particular skills and a level of creativity. However, these campaign ideas are not unique to North Port and can be replicated by other municipalities.