2018 SWANA Excellence Award
Awareness Campaign
City of Toronto

"Recycle Right"

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Population: 2.8 million
Households: 1 million (approximate)
"Recycle Right" budget: $715,000
Cost per household: $0.72 (approximate)
Executive Summary

Over the last number of years, the City of Toronto has seen a significant amount of garbage and other non-recyclable material in the Blue Bin recycling stream, also known as contamination. In 2017, the contamination rate reached approximately 27%. The increase can be attributed to a number of factors, including confusion regarding proper waste disposal practices as new materials are introduced into the market, mixed messages for consumers (not all items with the recycling symbol can be recycled, for example), differences between municipalities and what products they accept in their recycling stream, problematic packaging such as multilayered plastics, and a lack of awareness of the implications of improper disposal of non-recyclable items.

In order to raise awareness about the issue and implications of contamination, Toronto implemented a multi-pronged awareness campaign that included paid advertising, targeted outreach to single-family homes and multi-residential customers and a direct mail campaign.

The need for an awareness campaign: Overview

Toronto is the largest city in Canada with a diverse population of more than 2.8 million people. Toronto’s Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS) division provides collection service to approximately 461,000 single-family homes; and 409,000 multi-residential units in approximately 4,300 buildings. In 2016, residents living in single-family homes had a diversion rate of 65%, while multi-residential building residents achieved a rate of 28% - for a combined residential diversion rate of 52%. Toronto’s Long Term Waste Management Strategy outlines recommendations on how to best manage the City’s waste over the next 30 to 50 years and has set a goal of 70% diversion by 2026, which equals approximately 200,000 additional tonnes being diverted from the landfill.

Since the inception of Toronto’s recycling program, we have aimed to reduce contamination in the Blue Bin. This has been done through education, enforcement, and the general promotion of more recycling friendly habits. At the same time, the Blue Bin program has had to evolve to expand the types of accepted recyclable materials. This expansion was necessitated because the introduction of new types of packaging and product materials, the creation of new recyclable markets, legislative requirements and many other factors. More importantly, the expansion of recyclable materials in the Blue Bin Recycling Program ensures less material ultimately ends up in landfill and is consistent with the City’s waste diversion targets.

Despite ongoing efforts to combat contamination and the allowance of new items in the Blue Bin, contamination has increased over time due to confusion regarding proper waste disposal practices as new materials are introduced into the market (sometimes with conflicting messaging), differences between municipalities and what products they accept in their recycling stream, problematic packaging such as multilayered plastics, and a lack of awareness of the implications of improper disposal of non-recyclable items.
Research: Qualitative and Quantitative

In early 2017, qualitative research conducted by Ipsos (an independent research firm) with residents in multi-residential units indicated that beyond the obvious items – cans, plastic bottles and paper – there was some uncertainty around what can and what cannot be recycled. In cases of uncertainty, a number of ‘strategies’ were used to determine whether an item is recyclable. Some looked for the recycling sign on the packaging, others made a best guess based on how similar the item in question is to other things they knew for certain could or could not be recycled. A few participants would consider if the item could be reused in order to determine whether it is recyclable.

This research also indicated that there were some differences in what the default was when there was doubt around whether something is recyclable. Some adopted a position of better to include it with the recycling and it can be sorted at the facility. For others, throwing it with the garbage was the default because they had heard that throwing garbage with the recycling can result in increased cost for the City and can potentially cause contamination in the recycling program.

In May 2017, quantitative research conducted through Ipsos indicated that 55% of Toronto residents either don’t know (33%) or think nothing happens (22%) to items that are placed in the recycling bin that can’t be recycled. Less than half of the residents surveyed (44%) believed that such items ruin other items that can be recycled, resulting in added costs for the City.

Despite various education and outreach efforts over the years, there is clearly continued confusion and misinformation in the marketplace. As a result, Toronto saw a significant amount of garbage and other non-recyclable material in the recycling stream, reaching a contamination rate of approximately 27% last year.
The most common contaminants found in the Blue Bin are primarily organic wastes, garbage and oversized materials. Other contaminants include textiles, material in black plastic garbage bags and black plastic, and items such as hot beverage containers and single serve coffee pods.

In 2017, Toronto decided to implement targeted measures to help increase awareness among residents about the implication of contamination and ultimately strive to reduce contamination in the Blue Bin recycling program.

**Planning and Goal Setting**

In 2016, Toronto launched a new public education campaign to help raise awareness of the issue of contamination. Last year, the "Recycle Right" campaign was enhanced and other tactics were added in order to reach a wider audience.

**Target Audience:** All residents in single-family homes and residents in multi-residential units (apartments and condos) serviced by the City.

The overall objective was to reach the target audience through:
- Public education (paid media)
- Outreach (bin inspections/enforcement)
- Direct mail

All aspects of the awareness campaign received media coverage. This earned media helped to reinforce the key messages.

**SMART Objectives**

**Specific:** Leverage existing creative and use it in various media channels, including strategically placed paid advertising and social media. Add direct mail and outreach to broaden awareness and reach the audience in different ways.

**Measurable:** Track campaign in various channels. Measurement includes click through rates on digital ads, impressions, video views and audit data. Over a longer period of time, measurement will also include a decrease in the amount of contamination in the Blue Bin. Monitoring will be ongoing.

**Attainable:** Utilize the combination of efforts to reach the target audience and increase awareness about contamination.

**Relevant:** Help educate the audience through ads in the public domain, at the point of "the behaviour" through bin inspections/enforcement and then deliver a direct mail piece to all homes and multi-residential units to reinforce the message. Residents were directed to a dedicated web page to learn how to "recycle right".

**Time-bound:**
All tactics were implemented in the 2017 calendar year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Timing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education Campaign</td>
<td>Summer and Fall 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach: Bin inspections single-family</td>
<td>Spring – December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach: Bin inspections multi-residential</td>
<td>January – December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct mail</td>
<td>Late-November</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
"Recycle Right" Awareness campaign: Implementation

In 2017, efforts to increase awareness about contamination in the Blue Bin recycling program were implemented through three targeted measures: **public education**, **outreach** and **direct mail**.

**MEASURE #1: Public Education**

In 2016, the City of Toronto, in conjunction with Publicis (our agency of record) determined that in order to break through the saturated media market, a shift in messaging was required.

**Insight:**
- Recycling contamination is caused by a number of factors including confusion or misunderstanding of what is and isn’t recyclable:
  a) While some believe they are doing the right thing when it comes to Blue Bin recycling, they don't realize that recycling the wrong items is causing much more harm than good.
  b) Some residents hope that something can be recycled ("wish cycling"), not realizing their actions are contaminating otherwise good recycling.
- Toronto had done a lot of education around what can be recycled but it was clear that more education was needed on items that cannot be recycled and why.
- It is always more difficult to change behaviour when there is no perceived benefit for the individual. It is also more difficult to capture attention. This desired behaviour change (not contaminating Blue Bin recycling) will require a long-term, multi-pronged, sustained approach in order to get most residents to pay attention, care and change their behaviour.
- Research conducted in 2015 identified residents aged 18 to 34 as the least likely to participate in various waste management programs. The creative used for this campaign must be clever and unique in order to capture the attention of this demographic (as well as to break through the clutter of competing messages to all our audiences.)

**Campaign Goals:** Reduce Blue Bin recycling contamination in Toronto.

**Creative:**
New ads were developed that were deliberately a departure from "typical” municipal advertising. The campaign was designed to educate and entertain about a subject that is otherwise not engaging and/or not easy to comprehend. The message was simple: "Bad things happen when recycling and non-recyclable (food scraps, textiles etc.) items get together”, but it was compelling enough for the viewer/reader to want to learn more.

The call to action “Learn why at toronto.ca/recycleright”, drove the audience to a dedicated webpage that featured other items that should not go in the Blue Bin, such plastic containers with food residue, video
cassettes (black plastic) and coffee cups. Information on the website explained why these items are problematic and how to properly dispose of them.

In an effort to keep the audience engaged, three different creative concepts were developed.

The first scenario is a banana sitting on a photocopier making copies while a milk carton urges him on. Other scenarios include an old sock (textile) and a pop can walking through wet cement and touching a dinosaur display in a museum, a fishbone and a dish soap bottle toilet papering a tree/house.

Videos: Three versions (Ctrl + click on image to play)

Bad things happen when old clothes and recycling get together.

Bad things happen when food scraps and recycling get together.

Bad things happen...
Media:

A comprehensive media strategy was implemented to hold relevance to the desired target audience and increase message visibility and accessibility. The advertising plan included:

- Television
- Movie theatre screens (pre-show)
- Print (English and multi-language)
- On-line (English and Chinese)
- Paid and unpaid social media (Facebook and Twitter)
- Subway and transit shelters

Other tactics included:
- Breakfast Television segment
- Truck signs
- Dedicated URL (toronto.ca/recycleright) and custom web content

Transit shelters

![Transit shelter ad](image1)

Subway ad

![Subway ad](image2)

Chinese newspaper ad

![Chinese newspaper ad](image3)

Social media

![Social media ad](image4)
MEASURE #2: Outreach / Bin inspections

Another key measure for Toronto to help reduce contamination was increased monitoring and enforcement related activities. In late 2016, Solid Waste Management Services staff implemented proactive inspections at all multi-residential customers with front-end collection. If excessive contamination was found, staff provided various educational material to encourage proper recycling behavior, and the contaminated Bins were collected as garbage.

In 2017 outreach efforts at multi-residential buildings continued and approximately 24,000 site visits were completed, of which roughly 16% were found to have contaminated Blue Bins.

In addition to enforcement and monitoring at multi-residential locations, Solid Waste Management Services further expanded outreach efforts last year through a pilot program for single-family homes. Staff visually inspected curbside Blue Bins on collection day to identify excessive contamination. When excessive contamination in residential Blue Bins was observed, the bin was tagged with a notice, moved back from the curb, and not collected.

The notice provided instructions on how to remove the contaminated items and additional educational material is provided. A follow up visit was conducted on the next collection day (two weeks later) to verify that the contamination had been removed.

In 2017, all single-family homes were visited once during Blue Bin collection (approximately 460,000 addresses), of which roughly 4% had contaminated Blue Bins.
MEASURE #3: Direct Mail

Toronto's "Recycle Right" Awareness campaign culminated in late November 2017 with a direct mail piece sent to all households in the City: 445,642 single-family homes and 599,546 apartment/condominium units in multi-residential buildings.

The mailing included a letter and a "brochure" with creative that mirrored the advertising from earlier in the year, and reinforced the reasons why contamination is a problem and the implications of the behaviour, including that recycling mistakes could cost the resident money.

A corresponding letter was also sent to over 2,000 Property Managers and Superintendents in multi-residential buildings that receive collection from the City.

Creative:
- Unaddressed envelope with "Important Notice" on the front in English, Chinese, Tamil and Spanish (chosen based on Top Languages spoken according to 2016 Census data)
- Folded "brochure" with the same concept / characters used in the Contamination advertising campaign
- Letter to residents about the importance of proper sorting and tips on how to "recycle right" (Two versions – one for residents in houses, one for apartment / condo residents).
- The letter also had a summary of information translated into Chinese, Tamil, Portuguese and Spanish and directs people to call 311 if more information is required.

DIRECT MAIL FRONT
DIRECT MAIL BACK

STILL NOT SURE WHERE YOUR WASTE ITEM GOES?
Use our handy Waste Wizard tool at toronto.ca/wastewizard

DIRECT MAIL INSIDE

RECYCLING MISTAKES COULD COST YOU.
When you put the wrong things in your Blue Bin, you ruin your recycling. This means perfectly good recyclables end up in the landfill, creating extra cost for the City and you.

LEARN WHAT DOESN'T GO IN YOUR BLUE BIN.

1. FOOD & ORGANIC WASTE
   Food scraps, pet waste, diapers, eggshells and expired leftovers

2. CONTAINERS WITH FOOD
   Peanut butter jars, takeout containers and squeeze bottles

3. CLOTHING & TEXTILES
   All clothing items, shoes, blankets, towels and curtains

4. ALL BLACK PLASTIC
   Packaging, garbage bags and VHS tapes

5. COFFEE CUPS
   Hot drink cups and black plastic lids

To learn more about why these items don't belong in recycling, visit toronto.ca/recycleright
Budget

The total budget to implement the "Recycling Right" Awareness campaign:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education Campaign: execution of two media buys, production, fees</td>
<td>$450,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach: Bin inspections single-family: staff time</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach: Bin inspections multi-residential: staff time</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct mail: production, fees and Canada Post delivery</td>
<td>$265,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**staff conducted outreach efforts as part of their regular work assignments, so specific costs for this project are not available.

Results

As result of the combination of public education, outreach efforts and direct mail, the overall awareness level about the issue of contamination in the Blue Bin has increased among Toronto residents.

Over the course of the two media buys (summer and fall 2017) **9,062,016 impressions** were delivered across the digital platforms. The campaign **over delivered impressions by 113%**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Impressions Planned</th>
<th>Impressions Delivered</th>
<th>Impressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>theweathernetwork.com</td>
<td>Display &amp; Video</td>
<td>423,622</td>
<td>139.189%</td>
<td>589,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singtao.ca (Chinese)</td>
<td>Display</td>
<td>175,000</td>
<td>287.662%</td>
<td>503,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creaders.net (Chinese)</td>
<td>Display</td>
<td>175,000</td>
<td>182.000%</td>
<td>318,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ccue.ca (Chinese)</td>
<td>Display</td>
<td>175,000</td>
<td>264.649%</td>
<td>463,135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenith Marketplace</td>
<td>Display &amp; Video</td>
<td>4,032,361</td>
<td>159.590%</td>
<td>6,435,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(various sites)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thestar.com</td>
<td>Display &amp; Video</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>250.692%</td>
<td>752,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>213.964%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The on-line ads also delivered a **high click through rate of 0.24%** compared to industry's benchmark (0.08%) which means creative resonated with the audience showing they were interested in clicking to find out more. According to Google Metrics a click through rate of 0.21% + is considered "excellent".

Toronto's contamination ads were competing against multiple categories online. The closest category that Solid Waste would fall under (out of the categories listed by Google) is "Government & Utilities'. Google states that the overall click through rate in this category is 0.12%.
Paid Facebook posts achieved **5,756,318 impressions**. The demographic reached most was Adults 18 – 24, which met our objective of targeting residents aged 18 to 34.

The videos used in this campaign were also posted on the City of Toronto YouTube site. To date the videos have been viewed **over 1 million times**, making it one of the most viewed videos produced by Solid Waste Management Services.

Analysis provided by our media agency of record (Zenith Optimedia) attributes the success and over delivery of impressions to different factors:

- Multi-platform ads – using both display and video is one of the best ways to capture the audience’s attention and to drive engagement.
- The mix between the programmatic buy (various websites), on-line ethnic sites, and direct digital buys (The Weather Network and The Star).
- Constantly optimizing budgets through the programmatic media buy towards best performing websites, categories, audiences, and best performing devices (desktop/mobile/tablet).
- Using humor in the context of a serious subject leaves viewers with positive emotions and creates a connection that is likely to drive a positive response.

**Metrics at the multi-residential buildings and single-family homes**

In addition to the increased profile and awareness, in December 2017 the contamination rate dropped to approximately 25%, down from earlier in the year.

Findings from the first single-family inspections indicated that approximately 4% of residential curbside customers placed bins out with high levels of contamination. When these households were visited for a second time, 87% had corrected their behaviour and removed contamination from their recycling bin at the curb.

Audits indicate that over the past two years, approximately, we have seen a reduction in contamination in single-family Blue Bins. All 3 of the main targets of the "Recycle Right" campaign (textiles, food waste, and black plastic) have decreased in the Blue Bin recycling program.

**Earned Media**

The "Recycle Right" Awareness campaign has resulted in significant media interest, coverage and response. Ultimately, this helped to keep the issue in the spotlight and extend the message to a wider audience.

Coverage last year included s TV, radio and newspaper stories. Sample headlines include (**click link for story**):

- What you should and shouldn't recycle -Toronto [Breakfast Television Sept 18, 2017](www.bttoronto.ca/videos/what-you-should-and-shouldnt-recycle/)
What you should and shouldn’t recycle

Adam is live with Jim McKay, General Manager of the Solid Waste Management Services for the city of Toronto to know everything about recycling.

Pilot project aimed at educating Toronto residents on recycling.
May 30, 2017 Toronto Star - Torontonians failing at sorting garbage from recycling costing the city ... The most egregious of all is the ubiquitous black plastic bag...

City trying to get Torontonians to stop filling recycling bins with garbage
Jun 1, 2017 CBC News - The city of Toronto has launched a six-month pilot project to reduce the ... Under the pilot project, if contaminants are found in recycling bins.

Blue bin battle: How Toronto is fighting to keep your recycling garbage-free
Jul 7, 2017 The Globe and Mail – The Globe follows the contents of Toronto's blue bins from the curb to the processing facility, and finds everything from coffee cups and plastics...

Toronto blue bins will be sifted through to see who’s putting in the wrong items
December 11, 2017 Toronto Star - Dear resident: Don’t be surprised to see someone rummaging through your blue bin after it’s put out to the curb for collection.

Toronto targeting recycling contamination with bin inspections
December 12, 2017 Global News - The City of Toronto says it’s lifting the lids on residents’ recycling bins in order to help curb a pricey problem.

Toronto steps up bin inspection to fix multimillion-dollar contamination problem
December 14, 2017 Waste Dive-Toronto's Solid Waste Management Services division is ramping up its recycling bin inspection efforts after reporting a 26% contamination rate last year, as reported by Global News and others.

What to NOT put in your recycling bin
December 18, 2017 Metro Morning - Have you gotten one of those letters from the City of Toronto, about blue
bin contamination and inspections? No need to panic, as long as you recycle right -- which may be trickier than it seems.

Does your New Year's resolution include proper recycling? The city hopes so
December 26, 2017 CBC.ca - Here's where to put all that ribbon and wrapping paper to help the city reduce contamination in blue bins.

Evaluation: what Toronto learned

In 2017, the "Recycle Right" campaign initiatives increase the overall awareness level about the issue of contamination in the Blue Bin.

Despite the efforts of Solid Waste Management Services to engage with and educate residents and customers on proper participation in waste diversion programs, contamination in the Blue Bin Recycling Program remains a persistent issue.

In order to shift and maintain behaviour change, Toronto will need ongoing and sustained public education to reach the target audience and consistently remind them of what items can and cannot be recycled. Toronto recognizes that proper sorting has become more complicated over the last number of years, so we will continue to encourage residents to use the tools available to them to find out where to properly dispose of items.

Outreach efforts and the "threat" of a monetary impact was a good motivation for some residents to improve their sorting in the Blue Bin. However, upon further investigation, it was observed that sometimes contamination was buried deeper in the bin. Some addresses that were visited a second time showed significant improvement after a refusal to collect and as a result, this pilot program for single-family homes will continue through 2018.

It is also important to note that the definition of contamination is directly tied to the market in which recyclable materials are being sent. Therefore, in some cases, contamination is rising in the City, not because residents are doing a worse job at sorting their recyclables, but because the markets are demanding better quality materials. What was once accepted in the Blue Bin Recycling Program is no longer acceptable at market due to stricter quality requirements.

Key learnings

- Behaviour change cannot be attained over a short period of time.
- Diversity of the audience requires communication through different channels and in different languages.
- The message needs to be repeated often and in various different mediums.
- Breaking away from "traditional" municipal advertising helps to reach an audience that might otherwise not pay attention.
- The added value of earned media helps credibility to the message and keeps the conversation going in the public realm. The media becomes another avenue to help educate residents.

This campaign could be replicated in other communities. The key to a successful campaign is to use a consistent "look and feel" across all channels and repeat the message as broadly and as frequently as possible.