In 2011-2012, a plateau in recycling tonnage to the Athens-Clarke County Recovered Materials Processing Facility (ACC RMPF) led to the need for a new communications campaign that utilized both traditional marketing methods and new communication strategies. The two-part campaign included expanded opportunities to recycle through the installation of permanent recycling bins in the downtown area, and integrating public education and media relations to residential curbside recycling customers.

Combining four unique components into a single, comprehensive communication plan yielded maximum impact on paid advertising and outreach methods. First, the campaign needed to be visually appealing to engage the diverse target markets. Second, the bins needed to be well-designed and marked properly in order to yield clean recyclables. Third, curbside customers needed to be re-energized in order to produce more recyclables. Last, the overall program had to be easily modified for maximum reach through print advertising, outreach efforts, promotional items, and visual methods.
Statement of Intent

The Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Recycling Division has a robust program that has been used as a model for many communities. Most full-time residents in Athens, Georgia are well informed about waste reduction and seek out ways to reduce the amount of landfill waste that is produced. In contrast, a percentage of residents in this area are seasonal renters pursuing degrees in higher education or technical trades. Their view on waste is very different from residents who live, work, own property, and pay taxes in Athens. Both groups historically have responded well to positive reinforcement through fresh marketing and communication methods that energize or ignite their recycling habits.

When planning this new marketing and communications campaign to increase recycling tonnage, two overarching methods were used. An outreach program to residential curbside recycling customers using on-the-go advertising on billboards and transit buses, coupled with community outreach events where staff members could talk directly with residents about recycling. A trendy electronic marketing tactic geared toward downtown patrons about using new permanent recycling bins placed in the downtown area was distributed through social media, video channels, and a paid televised PSA.

Exactly five months after the campaign rollout, the ACC RMPF recorded its largest single day incoming tonnage ever of 136.70 tons of material.
Research and Planning

With a consistent flow of printed information, outreach, and community involvement by staff members, it was uncertain why recycling levels had plateaued. But, actual reports from the ACC RMPF showed that tonnage remained unchanged for months, and in some instances was lower than previous years, when comparing annual statistics.

Residents of all ages had become accustomed to seeing and using permanently placed pedestrian garbage cans for waste while in the downtown Athens area and often used them instead of seeking out recycling options. Tons of recyclable material was sent daily to the landfill from these sources. Recycling bins were removed from the downtown area 7 years prior because of severe contamination issues and poor design.

The downtown Athens area is a compact grid of streets with no alley access comprised mainly of retail shops, restaurants, and bars. The ACC Solid Waste Department is the sole provider of service for this area and has arrangements with all businesses to pick up trash and recycling curbside at specified times. Recycling bins are located inside most of the establishments, although may not be readily accessible (i.e. located behind the scenes for easy employee access) to all patrons. While employees and business owners did a superior job of collecting recyclables from deliveries or patrons that were inside their establishments, once on the street those same patrons did not have an option to recycle.

Staff determined that permanent recycling bins located downtown and incorporated into a full-blown communication campaign could capture recyclable material, diverting it from the landfill and adding to the tonnage at the RMPF.

(continued)
Research and Planning cont.

In order to make the campaign successful, targeting downtown patrons of all ages through well-designed and well-marked bins was essential. The recycling bins needed to gel, in look and design, with existing pedestrian garbage cans while remaining unique enough to support the intended purpose of collecting only recyclables. The campaign also needed to be fresh in order to ignite or re-ignite people to recycle more. The true measurement of success for this campaign was from reports of tonnage from the RMPF and from ACC Solid Waste employees that work in the area visual (qualitative) feedback on use and contamination of the downtown bins.

The greatest challenge to this project was creating an approach that would capture the attention of both Athens residents and visitors to downtown. It had to be multi-faceted with a clear and strong message. Because of the delivery methods of the message, it also had to be easily recognizable and able to be used in a wide variety of communication tools.

(Left) Independently owned and operated newspaper, *Flagpole* article on Oct 2, 2013 featuring the return of recycling bins in the downtown area

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**Athens-Clarke County is home of Georgia’s first municipally operated residential curbside recycling program**

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*NEWS CITY DOPE*

Downtown Recycling
By Blake Aued@BlakeAued

Downtown Recycling: Finally, you can recycle your Flagpole downtown after you read it. Last week, the Athens-Clarke County Solid Waste Department installed 25 of what will eventually be 32 recycling receptacles next to downtown trash cans. “They sprung up like little mushrooms downtown,” Waste Reduction Administrator Suki Janssen said.

There used to be recycling receptacles downtown, but Janssen had them removed because they weren’t being used properly. People were throwing too much trash into them, or throwing bottles into the ones for paper and vice versa. Then the county went single-stream, and now all recyclables go into one bin and are sorted out later.

Janssen estimated that 80-90 percent of the contents of downtown trash cans are recyclable. Conversely, about 5 percent of recycling is contaminated with landfill-bound garbage, but that’s not too big of an obstacle. How will Solid Waste stop people from tossing in a half-eaten burrito? “Breaking their fingers,” she joked. “We won’t. There’s no way to stop them.”

They’re different color than trash cans, though, and prominently labeled. Solid Waste is also filming a public service announcement that’s a spoof of “The Walking Dead.”

The metal cans were chosen for easy maintenance. “We know it’s going to get tagged,” Janssen said. “We know it’s going to get stickers. It was important to have something we could repaint and re-sticker.”

The new receptacles cost $30,000 to buy and install, and were paid for out of last year’s budget.
In May 2013, Curbside Value Partnership (CVP) offered an invitation-only grant opportunity to kick start new awareness campaigns for communities that demonstrate both a commitment to education and to increasing collection and participation in curbside recycling programs. Applications were being accepted for two programs. The first program offered up to $5,000.00 in a matching grant to increase or improve an existing education plan. The second program offered up to $25,000.00 in grant funds to programs that could produce measureable results of a specific marketing activity geared toward a selected recycling route or area. ACC was selected as a winner in both programs and received a total $30,000 in grants funds.

The ACC Recycling Division determined that the best use of the funds would be to outsource services from a public relations firm to create a new visual image or graphic symbol that would serve as 1) the starting point for a new communications campaign and 2) an enhancement to existing programs. The dual-purpose message would need to serve as a communication tool for both re-energizing curbside recycling rates along with introducing the new downtown recycling bins.

Several goals of the new recycling campaign included getting people excited to recycle more, to think about recycling more, to take necessary measure to ensure their materials are recycled, and to make recycling a habit.

These goals became the basis of a question posed to an outside public relations firm by the ACC Recycling Division staff. That question and challenge was simply: “We want more from our community!”
Implementation and Execution cont.

The winning concept was a stylized version of the word MORE. It addressed what the ACC Recycling Division wanted to accomplish which is: to increase tonnage and offer more opportunities to dispose of recyclables. Upon closer look at the MORE logo, the message becomes clearer that this is geared toward recycling...MORE. Cleverly hidden within the letters M-O-R-E are a glass bottle, plastic bottle, juice box, aluminum can, plastic jug, paper tube, and folded newspaper. Since Athens-Clarke County has a single-stream recycling facility, there were no questions that all of the materials in the graphic symbol were traditional recyclable materials.

Once messaging was determined, implementing the program was a full-blown communications attack utilizing billboards, transit bus signage, recycling collection truck vinyl signage, county vehicle vinyl wrap, social media communications, internal communications, press releases, outreach events, local media coverage, and a 30 second PSA suitable for television. The message, via visual image was installed within a one-week timeframe throughout the city. Billboards, transit bus signage, and televised PSA remained in place for a total 12 weeks. Social Media, outreach events, press releases, internal communications, collection truck vinyl signage, and local media coverage continued for an additional 12 weeks, totaling six months of coverage.

To enhance the visual on-the-go aspects of the campaign (transit bus signs, collection truck signage, pick up truck wrap and billboards) and connect the purpose of placing recycling bins downtown, a video PSA was created. The video is a spoof on the popular television show “The Walking Dead” showing several zombies walking through downtown Athens with recyclables in their hand, as one zombie prepares to place an aluminum can into the trash, a person based on the show’s popular character Daryl Dixon shoots an arrow through the zombies hand while holding the can, essentially saving it from being thrown into the trash.

Graphic artist copy of billboards that were displayed around the City during a 12-week timeframe

(continued)
The basic premise and tagline of the PSA is to not be a mindless zombie while patronizing downtown Athens by putting recyclables into trash cans and instead use the new recycling bins, thereby recycling MORE. The end shot of the PSA is the MORE campaign image. The PSA was launched prior to Halloween and the returning season of “The Walking Dead” in order to maximize it’s impact and exposure.

To solicit residential interest in the program, two outreach events were planned. First was a one-day spread the word type event located at a popular recycling drop off site that was scheduled for four hours on a Saturday. Residents became aware of the event through a series of pre-event paid radio slots that ran a week prior to the event, and also through event flyers that were posted downtown by University of Georgia (UGA) Terry College of Business Go Green students. Go Green Team volunteers issued a contest to all UGA groups where the group that brought in the most recyclables during the one-day event would win $250.00 for their group to help with fundraising. During the event, staff members and UGA Go Green Team volunteers answered questions about the campaign and distributed high quality promotional items of tee shirts and Tervis style tumblers with the campaign image. UGA groups that entered the fundraising contest brought by recyclables they had collected to have them weighed. A live radio remote broadcast was also on site giving real-time on air commentary about the event to further encourage more attendees. The ACC Sheriff’s Office was on site during the event to collect unused or expired medication, thereby encouraging residents to recycle MORE. In total, the day was successful with many residents become aware of the new campaign and many temporary UGA students pledging to make recycling a habit.

A second outreach event planned in conjunction with the campaign release was a paint collection and recycling event to inspire people into recycling MORE through the proper disposal of paints, solvents, and thinners. The event was promoted by a flyer inserted into the residential water bill envelope as part of a listing of events to be held during the week of America Recycles Day. The premise of this event was to encourage residents into thinking “beyond the bin” to other items that are accepted for recycling at the ACC Recycling Facility. Paints, thinners, and solvents are on going collected items that residents can recycle free of charge during business hours. This event proved that residents embraced the recycle MORE campaign by participating and recycling a combined total of 3,413.14 gallons of latex and oil based paint during the three-hour event.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Communication Tool</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May, 2013</td>
<td>Press Release</td>
<td>Distributed press release about CVP Connect education grant.</td>
<td>CVP Connect, Hill &amp; Knowlton</td>
<td>N/A - used existing staff resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August, 2013</td>
<td>MORE artwork</td>
<td>Artwork for new campaign was selected from 4 final concepts created by DMC Creative.</td>
<td>Hill &amp; Knowlton, DMC Creative</td>
<td>$15,000.00 used from grant monies</td>
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<tr>
<td>August, 2013</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>RecycleMoreACC.org web domain was purchased to reinforce new campaign. The domain pointed to a visual listing of all accepted recyclable items on current site.</td>
<td>GoDaddy.com, ACC Public Information Office and CIS Departments</td>
<td>$40.32 used from grant monies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August, 2013</td>
<td>Transit Bus Signage</td>
<td>Contracted production and installation of advertising on 9 transit buses and 10 interior card signs with ACC Transit.</td>
<td>Athens-Clarke County Transit System through Renaissance Marketing</td>
<td>$5,100.00 used from grant monies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August, 2013</td>
<td>Outdoor billboards</td>
<td>Contracted production and installation of 6 billboards downtown and surrounding residential areas for a total of 12 weeks through Fairway.</td>
<td>Fairway Outdoor Advertising</td>
<td>$7,715.00 used from grant monies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August - November, 2013</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Created several posts to inform followers about various stages of the campaign. A post showing a picture of a trash can next to a new recycling bin generated a viral response of 2,365 views.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A - used existing staff resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September, 2013</td>
<td>Promotional Items - Tumblers</td>
<td>Ordered Tervis style tumblers with new campaign image to use as premium giveaways.</td>
<td>Weisenbach Recycled Products Inc.</td>
<td>$981.75 used from grant monies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September, 2013</td>
<td>Banners</td>
<td>Ordered 2-30’ x 60’ banners with new campaign artwork to use at outreach programs and events.</td>
<td>Fast Signs</td>
<td>$159.00 used from grant monies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September, 2013</td>
<td>Promotional Items - Tee shirts</td>
<td>Tee shirts with new campaign image to use as giveaways were ordered.</td>
<td>Ruby Sue Graphics</td>
<td>$917.75 used from grant monies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>Collection truck vinyl signage</td>
<td>Contracted with DMC Creative to produce and Athens Blueprint to install a vinyl sign with the new campaign image onto both sides of 1 recycling collection truck.</td>
<td>Athens Blueprint and DMC Creative</td>
<td>$5,000.00 from ACC Recycling Division operational budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>Video PSA &quot;Don't be a Mindless Zombie&quot;</td>
<td>Recycling MORE Zombies commercial is produced to use on website and as a paid televised PSA.</td>
<td>Radar Productions, interns, and volunteers as zombies</td>
<td>$4,810.67 from ACC Recycling Division operational budget.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>Event signage</td>
<td>Printed 50 Recycle More flyers to post in downtown Athens and on UGA campus advertising a campaign awareness event.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bel Jean Copy Print Center and UGA Terry College of Business Green Team Class Project</td>
<td>$32.00 used from grant monies. Students volunteered time as part of a leadership class project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>Radio PSA</td>
<td>Contracted one-week radio promotion of 90 spots and a 2-hour remote broadcast in conjunction with a one-day campaign awareness event.</td>
<td>CoxMedia and UGA Green Team Class Project</td>
<td>$1,500.00 from ACC Recycling Division operational budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>University of Georgia Mascot</td>
<td>Popular University of Georgia mascot Spike contracted for live appearance.</td>
<td>UGA Spirit Office and UGA Green Team Class Project</td>
<td>$75.00 used from grant monies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>Newspaper interview and article</td>
<td>Feature Story about the return of downtown recycling bins was printed in weekly Newspaper.</td>
<td>Flagpole Independent News</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>Fleet pickup truck wrap</td>
<td>Contracted with DMC Creative to produce and Athens Blueprint to install a full vinyl vehicle wrap with campaign image.</td>
<td>Athens Blueprint and DMC Creative</td>
<td>$5,000.00 from ACC Recycling Division operational budget.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>October - December, 2013</td>
<td>Televized PSA</td>
<td>&quot;Don’t Be a Mindless Zombie&quot; PSA was aired 336 times on 8 stations between 3pm-12am on various days during Halloween-themed movies and shows.</td>
<td>Comcast Media</td>
<td>$3,108.00 from ACC Recycling Division operational budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 2013</td>
<td>One Man’s Trash Newspaper publication</td>
<td>Distribution of quarterly publication to residents that spotlighted the campaign image alongside the ACC Recycling Division’s Annual Report.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A - used existing resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2013</td>
<td>Outreach event</td>
<td>Scheduled one-day awareness event at a recycling drop off location to engage college students. Promotional items were distributed, mascots appeared and live radio feed was broadcast.</td>
<td>Power 100.1 radio station, UGA Green Team Class Project</td>
<td>N/A - used existing staff and volunteer resources, and pre-paid promotional items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November, 2013</td>
<td>Water bill insert and outreach event</td>
<td>Scheduled a paint collection and recycling event to encourage residential habits of recycling MORE non-traditional items.</td>
<td>Atlanta Paint Recycling</td>
<td>$300.00 from ACC Recycling Division operational budget for inserts along with existing staff resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A still image taken during the Don’t Be a Mindless Zombie PSA video shoot
Results and Evaluation

The uniqueness of this campaign lies in the powerful visual image. In an industry filled with images that include recycling symbols and trees designed in a gentle way to show residents what and where to recycle, this campaign took a different approach – a demanding call to action about recycling MORE through a visual cues used throughout an arsenal of communication tools and methods.

Reactions to the campaign were as hoped. Social media buzzed with applause and excitement for the new permanently placed downtown recycling bins. A social media post showing a picture of an existing trash can and new recycling bin side by side on a popular downtown street corner generated a viral response of 2,365 views in 4 short hours. Excitement was high and the bins were successfully integrated into the existing program as another tool for collection.

Success was easily measured by actual tonnage reports generated by the ACC RMPF, which showed an increase in the months preceding the campaign. On January 21, 2014 the RMPF reported the largest single day incoming tonnage ever of 136.70 tons of material.

Beyond RMPF tonnage reports, alternate ways that success was tracked and measured are:
- Visual inspections of recycle bin contents vs. pedestrian can contents show significantly more recyclables are placed into the correct bin.
- An influx of new social media followers comes out of any airing of the televised PSA, which currently runs as a free rotator to fill gaps in paid advertising time on cable stations and on an internal ACC Government run cable channel called ACTV (Athens Clarke Television).

The Recycle More campaign is a model that can easily be replicated. The use of a single action-oriented word presented in a stylized way can be utilized in any community through multiple communication or marketing pieces. This particular communication campaign was a means to introduce a new tool to the community by way of permanently placed recycle bins where there once was none. It remains a fun educational outreach tool. Any community that needs to ignite their program, find a fun and widely appealing communication campaign can use this program in their own community. Athens-Claire County is always open to sharing ideas and images. Like any good successful campaign, the true measure of success is seeing a program that began locally getting customized and copied in another community!
Supplemental Information

The following visual images support the communication efforts and methods put forth through this campaign. They range from still images taken during a PSA video shoot, billboard and transit bus images, and event displays and collections. These images and descriptions show the various methods used to communicate the campaign and efforts put forth in order to increase recycling awareness in the community and tonnage to the ACC RMPF.

Making of video PSA “Don’t be a Mindless Zombie!”

Preparing volunteer characters for PSA video shoot of Don’t Be a Mindless Zombie
Still image of Zombies taking over the City of Athens during PSA view shoot
Volunteer zombies walking in front of one of 6 billboards installed around Athens with campaign artwork

To view the PSA in its entirety, visit http://bit.ly/1j1669A

Still image of zombies during close up action shot and videographer
Image of mindless zombies attacking person doing the right thing by using new recycling bins located downtown
Still image of cast and crew after video shoot was complete
Images from a one-day awareness event introducing the MORE campaign to residents. The event was planned in part with University of Georgia students to increase recycling awareness among college-age students and generate a campaign buzz on campus.

Flyer promoting one-day awareness event posted over band signs on downtown bulletin boards

Promotional items distributed throughout the campaign timeline.

Spike, the UGA volleyball mascot, and fans holding promotional items distributed during an awareness event

Image of Spike helping collect recyclables from attendees at an awareness event

ACC Recycling Division staff member and UGA students at display table during awareness event
Images from on-the-go advertising methods are: a recycling collection truck, billboard, vinyl wrapped ACC fleet pickup truck, and transit bus vinyl sign.

(Top) Vinyl sign installed on a recycling collection truck

(Right top) Billboard installed on prominent location in Athens

(Right) Vinyl wrapped Ford F-150 pickup truck for the Recycling Division

(Bottom) Signage installed on passenger side of transit buses