Application for Marketing Excellence Award

Executive Summary:
The Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District is a union municipality serving a rural population of 52,000. With an extremely tight budget CVSWMD nonetheless founds funds to do something it had never done before: engage in a paid advertising campaign aimed to increase recycling and organics diversion in central Vermont. With just $15,000 ($5,000 in grant funding), and over a condensed five-month period, CVSWMD’s Did You Know? ad campaign increased recycling in the district by 5.4% and increased organics diversion by 13%. It also increased awareness of the district’s zero waste programming. As well, CVSWMD is on the forefront of implementing Act 148, Vermont’s Universal Recycling law which bans organics and recyclables from the landfill by 2020. The DYK ad campaign provided a template for the state and districts for preparing residents for significant upcoming changes in how they handle their trash (or resources, as we like to call it).

Statement of Intent

We have chosen the Marketing Excellence category for the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management “Did You Know?” Ad Campaign (DYK ad campaign) because, while promoting education and calls to action related to recycling and composting, this paid ad campaign was funded with the specific intent of increasing recycling diversion rates in CVSWMD’s largest communities, the cities of Barre and Montpelier, Vermont. The DYK ad campaign encompassed print, and radio media from October, 2013 – March, 2014, as well as incorporating existing organizational outreach tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, and e-newsletters.

Sample print ads from CVSWMD Did You Know? Advertising Campaign (see supplement for full size and recording of radio ads):
Research/Planning

The Need: CVSWMD had a multi-layered need to promote the recycling of materials and organics, including:

- District recycling rates had stagnated at just over 30 percent despite our operating under a Zero Waste Implementation Plan.
- Vermont’s new Universal Recycling Law, Act 148, bans recyclables from the landfill by 2015, and bans organics from the landfill (phased in) by 2020. CVSWMD wanted to start educating residents about this process as a lead-in to Act 148 specific outreach that will prepare them for requirements under the new law.
- CVSWMD has operated a business organics program for 10 years. Participation had flat lined. The DYK Ad Campaign addressed the need to compost for the same reasons we addressed recycling, but also with the goal of keeping food scrap diversion in the forefront of our residents’ minds as we go forward with implementing the phased in requirements of the new state mandated organics landfill ban. We also had a financial need to increase revenue, via new organics program participants, and a simultaneous requirement from the state of Vermont to assist area businesses and residents with food scrap diversion.
- The unwieldy name “Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District” has long remained an obstacle to name recognition, and, subsequently, understanding of what we do to reduce waste, so a secondary goal of this ad campaign was to associate our name and logo with our organics and recycling programming.

Materials used prior to implementing Did You Know ad campaign: Other than our how to literature (brochures, flyers, website downloads) CVSWMD has not engaged in this kind of paid outreach before, so we do not have prior used materials specific to our goals with this campaign. What we do have is listed below:

- CVSWMD distributes program specific brochures and flyers that detail our composting program and a list of mandated recyclables in our district.
- CVSWMD provides Soil Savers and Green Cones to our residents at cost, and provides free downloadable compost bin plans, mandated recyclables flyer, and A-Z guide about reuse and recycling a variety of items.
- CVSWMD offers a variety of information about recycling and composting on its social media and website.

Target Audience: Our Target Audience included:

- Residents who already recycle but are ready to take it to the next level
- Residents who are unaware of the environmental impacts of landfilling and will change behavior once they know.
- Residents who have been underexposed to the importance of diversion.
Marketing Goals: Our marketing goals for the Did You Know? Ad Campaign were as follows:

- **Primary Goals**
  - Increase understanding of ways to reduce, reuse, recycle and rot in central Vermont
  - Increase central Vermont diversion rate by 10 percent in FY 2014
  - Educate our district residents about CVSWMD programming
  - Educate district residents about WHY we have the programming we do.
  - Create simple, effective calls-to-action that create changes for individuals (e.g.: “Compost.” “Recycle.” Etc)

- **Secondary Goals**
  - Demonstrate that what we typically waste is actually a valuable resource
  - Create recognition and understanding of the term “Zero Waste”
  - Tie in with local, statewide, regional and national zero waste movements.
  - Increase traffic to our website and social media by 25% in FY14 in order that residents can continue to self-educate about the various ways they can divert resources from the waste-stream.
  - Improve CVSWMD name recognition
  - Eliminate the confusion between CVSWMD and Casella.

Anticipated Obstacles: We faced a few anticipated obstacles prior to starting this campaign, including:

- **Budget:** we knew that $15,000 was sufficient to run a comprehensive marketing campaign for a short period of time, but we were not able to tap into more effective means of communicating our message, such as TV, bus ads, short videos, etc. or run the campaign any longer than five months.

- **Taxpayer pushback:** CVSWMD is largely a taxpayer funded municipality. Our Board of Supervisors has been leery of funding advertising or marketing campaigns because of the perception that residents may object to using tax money to fund a marketing campaign.

Implementation/Execution

- **Timeline:** We decided to condense the ad campaign into five months to get the most out of a small budget. By saturating the area with print and radio messages within a five month period, the public would better absorb messages promoted in the ads than if they were spread more thinly over the course of a year. Thus, the marketing program was implemented using the following timeline:
  - February, 2013 – Develop rough idea for an ad campaign; create sample ads
  - March, 2013 – Develop and write DYK ad campaign proposal for FY2014 Budget, including: contacting media outlets to determine prices and feasible timelines for ad runs and negotiate volume discounts and public service discounts. Budget and Program approved by CVSWMD Board of Supervisors.
April – May, 2013 – Apply for grant from Curbside Value Partnership (CVP) Connect to help fund DYK ad campaign.

May – June, 2013 - Create digital survey to determine what residents already know about recycling and what they don’t know. Compile results of survey.

June 2013 – Consult staff to brainstorm areas in which residents are weak in knowledge of recycling and composting to establish an “idea list” for ad topics; $5,000 grant to fund recycling advertising awarded by CVP Connect, press release sent to local media.

June – July 2013 – Hone down list of ideas and survey results to five topics, which form the basis for development of print and radio ads.

July, 2013 – Create rough draft of ads on In Design

August, 2013 – Hire designer to create print ads; contact press and media outlets to firm schedules.


November 2013: Ad Campaign kicks off with a focus on food waste and composting around the holidays.


March, 2014 – Campaign ends

April/May – follow-up survey, analyze data

- **Budget**: The CVSWMD Board of Supervisors approved $10,000 of the $15,000 requested for this ad campaign. A grant from CVP Connect brought in $5,000, which allowed us to implement the campaign as originally envisioned. The budget covered the cost of print ads, radio ads, and graphic design. It did not cover expenses of staff time and travel. None of the activities exceeded the budget (see budget breakdown in Supplements section)

- **Collaborations**: The DYK Ad Campaign became a model for one way the state of Vermont can approach marketing and outreach of Vermont’s new Universal Recycling Law (Act 148). In collaborative meetings between solid waste management entities and the state Agency of Natural Resources, the DYK Ads were examined as potential models for coop ads between the waste management districts, alliances and solid waste management groups.

  - As a result of the attention the *DYK ads* garnered, the Chittenden Solid Waste District and CVSWMD embarked on a separate coop ad campaign focused solely on the two districts’ business organics programs. (See Supplements)

  - The CVSWMD and CSWD derivative coop ads have set up a model for the VT ANR for how districts can achieve state mandates for outreach while saving money, collaborating, and finding creative ways to market important recycling and organics information to our residents.

  - The CVSWMD and CSWD coop ads were developed in conjunction with graphic designers from the statewide publication *Seven Days*, and also provided a design template for other SW entities to use.
CVSWMD has made the *DYK ads* available for all the solid waste entities and ANR to use by posting it in an Act 148 working group “Dropbox” for use and observation by all parties.

- *How elements in planning phase were accomplished:* We implemented most of the elements described in the planning phase, particularly the “blitz” or saturation of print and radio ads.

  Elements accomplished include:

  - Use of simple text and basic graphics to convey call to action
  - One simple call to action per ad
  - Ad template that rotated many messages throughout the campaign
  - Saturated area media with our message for a specific period of time (5 months)
  - Ran regular 60 second radio ads in a series of three campaigns
  - Supported messages in ads with op-eds in local newspapers

Elements from planning process that were not implemented include:

- Plan called for ad saturation for 1 year – that time frame was condensed in order to increase impact by running more frequent ads for a shorter period of time.
- Plan called for digital advertising on Facebook and in local online newspaper: we decided to use free social media updates for the campaign, but did not engage in paid digital advertising.
- Original plan called for advertising in media throughout our 19 town district as well as state-wide. In order to stretch dollars and have the most impact locally, we revised the plan to included only media that covered our two biggest communities, Barre City and Montpelier. Media covering these areas reaches many surrounding communities also in our district, but it became clear as we embarked on running paid advertising that we would get more for our money if we ran more frequent ads in a zoned area, than if we spread the money across the district. Thus, instead of running the planned four quarterly ads in statewide papers such as *Seven Days* or the *Burlington Free Press* at a much higher cost than our local media, we were able to run 14 consecutive ads in the *Times Argus*, and the *World*. Available data indicates strong readership of these media outlets in our region.

- *How our Marketing Program is unique:* What makes the CVSWMD DYK ad campaign unique is our relatively small budget compared to the other municipalities we studied; and, unlike other organizations that tackled this subject with ad campaigns, we were targeting a rural community (our largest city has a population of just over 8,000). Also unique is that this ad campaign precedes significant changes in solid waste management in the state of Vermont with impending recycling and organics landfill bans. Indeed, it may be the rural nature of our target audience combined with the fact that the DYK ad campaign began a three year process of educating...
residents in order to get ready for implementation of the state ban on recyclables in the landfill that accounts for its success.

- Although we did not reach our 10 percent diversion increase goal, we did move our recycling diversion number up 5.4 percent and our MSW numbers down, and we increased organics diversion by 13%. Had the campaign had more funding and more time, the data points to a high likelihood we would see even more increases in recycling and organics diversion.

⚠️ Results/Evaluation

○ _How target audience reacted:_ Our goal was to increase recycling and composting among district residents in the area of Barre and Montpelier, our two largest municipalities in the CVSWMD. We achieved both goals and have data to track how our target audience reacted. We have seen an increase in recycling and a decrease in waste tonnage going to the landfill since running the DYK campaign November 2013 – March 2014, as well as an increase in organics diversion and revenue in our organics collection program. However, one of Vermont’s remaining two landfills – the Moretown Landfill – was not re-permitted by the state of Vermont in 2013, so we have to assume that factor likely also contributed to changes in waste tonnages. Changes correlated with the DYK ad campaign include:

- A 12 percent decrease in Mixed Solid Waste tonnage in our district during and after the DYK ad campaign ran. We realize that many other factors likely contributed to this number, but it is one indicator that our marketing program may have contributed to an overall decrease in trash in central Vermont. The graph below illustrates significant declines in trash in the CVSWMD, particularly during the months of our DYK ad campaign.

- _Increase in Recycling:_ Recycling tonnages increased by 52 tons – or 5.4 percent – in January and February, 2014, as compared to the same months in the previous year at the Central Vermont Transfer Station, run by Casella Waste Systems. This transfer station accepts waste from the targeted residents and communities in the DYK ad campaign.
- **Increase in Organics Diversion:** We saw an increase in organics diversion during the months of the ad campaign, which breaks down as follows:
  - 132 ton increase in organics diversion
  - $4,641 (13%) increase in revenue, DESPITE offering 1 month free and six months reduced rates to new generators, and also despite having to pay a higher tipping fee to our commercial composters (where we tip food scraps). (see supplement for details)
  - Please note that diversion increases have an exponential effect as, once begun, they tend to be on-going.

- **Anecdotal feedback:** CVSWMD staff was approached regularly by members of the public repeatedly mentioning the impact the DYK ads had had on them or family members or even children. The anecdotal feedback was not measured, but it did exist, and demonstrated that the ads successfully reached target audiences and got them thinking more about recycling and composting.

  - **How success was measured:** We measured our success by analyzing data sheets submitted by haulers in our district before and after the ad campaign. We also examined our organics diversion records, and took into account constant positive feedback from residents who saw or heard the ads.

  - **How program can be improved:** There were many successes with the DYK ad campaign and also some areas for improvement if or when we repeat it. Some areas for improvement include:
    - More frequent use of social media
    - Including funding for social media advertising to take advantage of zip code and demographic zoning
    - Use of free or inexpensive TV coverage such as cable access networks in order to create related videos to post on YouTube channels and disperse through social media
    - Targeted email campaign that coordinates with ads
    - Inclusion of TV and radio interviews and podcasts along with print and radio ads

  - **How can the program be replicated in other communities:** The DYK ad campaign is designed as a template ad format with community specific messages to be plugged in. Another organization or municipality could easily take this design, plug in their own logo, and target the messages to be relevant to the needs of their local target audience. Replicable features include:
    - Templates can be used with slight variation – changes in logos/names/messages
    - **Concept** can be replicated: simple message, one-word call to action, organizational contact/compelling image
    - As other communities take on zero waste goals, or even landfill bans, this kind of advertising is key.
    - Radio ads are also designed in three parts: part one introduces the ad campaign; part two holds the message; part three closes the ad with organizational contact info.
Supplements: See also attached to email: CVP Connect Grant press release, Sample Radio Ads. This ad ran as a full page cover for a supplement in the Barre-Montpelier Times Argus on Thanksgiving Day, 2013.
We received feedback from our school program staff that most students (and their parents) and even faculty and staff at the 29 schools in which we provide Zero Waste programming did not know that plastic is made from oil. So we used that information to create this ad.

**Did You Know?**

Plastic is made from **oil**, a nonrenewable resource.

All plastics, #1–7, can be recycled in central Vermont.
The budget:

Breakdown of Organics Program increase:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dec '13 - Mar '14</th>
<th>Dec '12 - Mar '13</th>
<th>$ Change</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ordinary Income/Expense</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4040 - Composting Income</td>
<td>65,520</td>
<td>58,052</td>
<td>7,468</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Income</strong></td>
<td>65,520</td>
<td>58,052</td>
<td>7,468</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross Profit</strong></td>
<td>65,520</td>
<td>58,052</td>
<td>7,468</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expense</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6155 - Composting Expense</td>
<td>16,868</td>
<td>12,227</td>
<td>4,641</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expense</strong></td>
<td>16,868</td>
<td>12,227</td>
<td>4,641</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Ordinary Income</strong></td>
<td>48,652</td>
<td>45,825</td>
<td>2,827</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Income</strong></td>
<td>48,652</td>
<td>45,825</td>
<td>2,827</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a result of the DYK ad campaign, CVSWMD collaborated with Chittenden Solid Waste District on Co-op ads and joint print materials targeting diners and restaurants during Restaurant Week, a huge foodie event in Vermont hosted by the state-wide newspaper, Seven Days. This is an example of one of the deliverables that came out of the collaboration, at minimal cost to both districts.